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# ESSAYS IN THE USE OF ENGLISH

*An Introduction to the Study of English*

By

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## PREFACE

**M**Y aim in this book is to endeavour to arouse in my readers some of the interest which I have found in the study of English language and literature.

So many people have found English a dull subject at school that they hesitate now before they decide to read a book; and as for writing, if more than a letter is required, they shows signs of diffidence. I hope that I can convince such people that they are not perhaps altogether just, or even charitable, to reading and writing; and that there is a good deal of interest, and a never-failing source of pleasure in the language that we speak and in the books that we ought to read.

So that this is not a thoroughgoing text-book, but rather a preliminary survey, and, I hope, an introduction to many other books. Man without language would be little better than the beasts. Man with an imperfect command of language comes short of the perfect fashion of a man. And if we regard literature as the record of the best thoughts and the noblest aspirations of our race, we surely miss a good deal if we neglect it utterly. That is what I want to say, and I hope that the chapters which follow will illustrate and amplify it.

I beg to thank the editor of *The Argus* for permission to reprint an article on Milton's *Lycidas* which figures in ch. vii. It is unfortunately impossible to write about poetry without quoting it by way of illustration. This is an educational book and such occasional quotations therefore are not an infringement of copyright. I beg to acknowledge the use as illustrative matter of part of John

Masefield's "Sea Fever" and "Cargoes" (Heinemann); part of Lawrence Binyon's "For the Fallen" (Elkin Matthews); John Drinkwater's "Symbols" (Sidgwick & Jackson); Arthur Waley's "On the Birth of His Son" (Constable); part of Siegfried Sassoon's "Everyone Sang" (Heinemann); and Miss Muriel Stuart will forgive me, I believe, for quoting "The Seed Shop" from her *Poems* (Jonathan Cape).

G.H.C.

MELBOURNE, 1934.

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# I

## THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

OUR language is one of the most important facts of human life. Just imagine for a moment what it would be like if we were all dumb. Suppose mankind had never learned to talk. We could only make people understand by gestures and cries. There would be no language, and no knowledge, because each man's discoveries would die with him. Without language, man would be to all intents and purposes an ape. Two of the greatest inventors have died and left no name. One was the very early man, aeons ago, who discovered that vocal gestures could be amplified so that they could be heard as well as seen, by making the vocal chords vibrate. He invented speech. The other was the comparatively recent man who lived only some five thousand years ago who discovered that the sounds of human speech could be represented by the conventional pictures which men were using as symbols of men and beasts and things. Drawings and paintings on rocks and in caves were a kind of magic used very early in man's career on earth. The man who first saw that pictures could represent speech, as well as things, *he* was a genius. He invented the alphabet. After that, history and discovery and philosophy could be recorded. Man could not only communicate; he could leave a heritage of knowledge for the next generation to better his instruction.

I want to sketch for you very briefly the history of our language. We use English ready made, but it has been



three thousand years in the making, and the materials of which it is composed come from many sources. We can't go back to the beginning, because we don't know where the beginning of our language took place, nor how many people first spoke it. But we know that in the thousand years before the Christian era, the tribes of a northern race whom we call Indo-Europeans or Aryans were wandering amongst the forests and plains and lakes of northern and central Europe. They spoke a highly inflected language amongst themselves which was quite different from that of the tribes who were living a similar sort of life in Asia, I mean the ancestors of the tribes, later known to history as the Huns and the Turks. And their language was quite different from that of the southern peoples of the centres of civilization in Mesopotamia and Egypt, and from those of the yellow men in China, and black men in Africa and southern India.

The Aryans wandered about the steppes of Russia and the plains of Hungary. They were a nomadic people, and they took with them their sheep and oxen, and later they learned to tame the horse. He must have been a bold adventurer who first sat on the back of a wild horse. They came in contact with the civilization of the south. They learned the use of corn and the practice of agriculture, and eventually at various times tribes of Aryans descended upon civilized countries and settled there. The tribe who called themselves Aryans or noblemen settled in Northern India, and drove the original black inhabitants, the Dravidians, to the south. The Medes settled in Persia, the Hittites in Asia Minor, the Greeks in Greece, the Latins in Italy, the Celts in France, Northern Italy, Belgium, and England; and they pushed the original

inhabitants of Europe out to the western 'fringe, into Spain, Ireland, and the highlands of Scotland. In Spain some of them still speak a language called Basque, which is quite unlike any other language.

The Greeks became civilized, as did the Latin peoples of Italy; and the Romans, the chief of the Latin tribes, eventually conquered both the Greeks and the Celts. At the beginning of the Christian era, Europe to the north of the Roman Empire, was inhabited by the Germans, who though they built houses and temples of wood, were still nomadic when hunger or enemies forced them on the march. The Germans were divided into many tribes, who inhabited Scandinavia, Holland, Germany and Thrace, but they all spoke one language with slight dialectal differences. This language, which was never written down, can only be inferred from the earliest Germanic dialects, such as Gothic, Old High German, Old Norse, and Old English. Primitive Germanic was originally an Aryan dialect, like Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit; but with this difference, that whilst these languages became the languages of civilized peoples and were fixed to a large extent by writing and by the cultivation of literature, Germanic remained the spoken language of barbarians. It was this barbarous language which became the direct ancestor of English, and the changes of vocabulary which have subsequently taken place have been steps along the road from barbarism to civilization.

English was originally the Germanic dialect of the Angles; and the English language, in the earliest state that we know, was taken to England from the lowlands of north Germany by the Angles and Saxons, who conquered Britain from the Celtic Welsh and Scots in the fifth and

sixth centuries A.D. England means Angle-land; and the language is called English because it was originally the language of the Engle or Angles. The language which they then spoke was a dialect of Germanic, almost exactly like that of the Saxons and Frisians. In the ninth century, Norsemen from Norway and Denmark settled in the northern part of England, in Northumbria; the Anglian supremacy was lost, and the dialect of Wessex, a Saxon dialect, became the standard English of the south of England in the period before the Norman conquest.

But the Anglo-Saxons were unable to hold the England which they had conquered. As you know, they were conquered, firstly by the Norsemen, and secondly by the Normans from France. If there had been no Norman conquest, we should probably now be speaking a language rather like modern Dutch. The Norman conquest of 1066 meant that the official language of England became Norman French, and as the Norman conquest gave an enormous impetus to scholastic education and to the monastic life of the church, it gave rise to a learned literature in Latin. History, philosophy, theology, and science were written in Latin. English ceased to be the official language of England, and it survived only as a number of peasant dialects. When it emerged again as Middle English, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it had undergone great changes. The inflexions by which old English had marked number, gender, and case, had nearly all disappeared; and in vocabulary, that is to say, in the words of the language, it was no longer purely English and Germanic. Some English words had fallen out of use, and had been replaced by Norse and French words. New words to express new terms of government, war, philosophy,

and art, borrowed from French and Latin, were to be found in the language. The seat of government and the court had been removed from Winchester to London, and hence, in the course of time, the old Wessex dialect of English lost its importance, and the London variety of the dialect of the eastern midland portion of England became the chief dialect.

This East Midland dialect of Middle English, English in its grammar, but a mixture of English, Norse, French, and Latin in its vocabulary, is the ancestor of the English which we write and speak to-day. You can study it most easily in the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer, the greatest English poet of the fourteenth century. You will find that a great many words have the inflexions -e or -en for various grammatical reasons; and you will meet with some words which have changed their meanings, and others which have fallen into disuse; but the English of Chaucer is substantially our English. Modern English is simply the later development of the London dialect as written by Chaucer. Since his time inflexions have been further simplified, and the plural inflexions of adjectives and verbs have died out. A great number of words from Latin and a few from Greek have been borrowed to express new philosophical and scientific ideas; but by the time of Chaucer the French element was already in the language, and Chaucer's English is the direct ancestor of our own.

Now I want to glance at some of the words which we have borrowed and taken into English, and the point of view I want you to keep in mind is that all these borrowings have been steps along the road from barbarism to civilization. These borrowed words are full of interest, and they tell us a good deal about how our language has

been influenced by new ideas; for, as you know, our present civilization is not simply our own development. We have become civilized by contact with other races and with fresh ideas. Our civilization has been built up partly by native character, it is true, but it has been greatly stimulated and influenced by outside forces. Of the English element in our language we can say simply that it is the foundation and the cement which holds the language together. The grammatical basis of our language is English, and so are most of the words of one syllable. A word is English unless it can be shown to be a borrowed word. Most of our simplest nouns, adjectives and verbs, most of our pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and all our grammatical inflexions are English still.

The earliest foreign influence on the English language was the influence of Roman civilization. It began whilst the English were still pagans, living in Germany. They came in contact with the Roman imperial system very much in the same way as the Afghan tribes of the Indian north-west frontier have come in contact with the British. Some of the tribes were enrolled in the legions. From the Romans they learned the elementary fact of civilization, namely town-life. Words like *street*, *wall*, *spade*, *pit*, *post*, *pile*, *port*, and *tile* are from the Latin and belong to this early period, because they are found also in German and Dutch. They learned also a good deal about cooking, as words like *kitchen*, *kettle*, *pan*, *cook*, *butter*, *cheese*, *cup*, *dish*, and others prove. There are also a few words taken from trade, such as: *pound*, *inch*, *sack*, *wine*, *candle*, *copper*, and *spend*. Then in the fifth and sixth centuries the Anglo-Saxons settled in England. They were pagans, and their isolation in Britain put them completely out of touch with

Roman civilization. The Romanized Britons who had inhabited the country they drove into Wales and Cornwall, and the English made new settlements. A few of the Roman cities, such as London, Lincoln, York, and Chester survived, but for the most part, the Anglo-Saxon invaders were countrymen who refused to live in towns. Our word *town*, an English word, originally meant a fenced farmhouse. Then in the seventh century came Christian missionaries, and the Anglo-Saxons came under the influence of the church. The language of the church, you will remember, was Latin; and so from the church they borrowed another group of Latin words, words which expressed the new religion, words such as *Pope*, *bishop*, *priest*, *creed*, *mass*, *minster*, *monk* and *nun*. Many names of plants and fishes belong to this period, such as *parsley*, *rose*, *lily*, *plum*, *trout*, and *mussel*. Also some words which superseded heathen ideas, such as *altar*, *idol* and *temple*.

The next influence was that of the Norse conquest of England. The Norsemen began to settle in the north of England in the ninth century, and their conquests culminated in a line of Danish kings, who ruled England from 1016-1042. Their language was another Germanic dialect, which probably the Anglo-Saxons could understand, although they could not speak it. The chief influence of the Norse conquest of England was upon the peasant dialects of the north and midlands of England. The Danish occupation added a few law-terms to the English language, such as *law* and *outlaw*, *wrong*, and the phrase *to crave a boon*, and a few social terms such as *earl*, *thrall*, *husband*, and *fellow*, and the verbs *call* and *take*. But the bulk of the Scandinavian words first made their appearance in Middle English from their use by the

peasants of the north; and they are to be found in considerable numbers in the writings of medieval authors in the north of England. Some of these words passed into the London dialect. Even in Chaucer, there are Scandinavian words. They are nearly all unpleasant but powerful words, which seem to have been introduced into English from the dialects because of their forcefulness, words such as *anger*, *grime*, *awkward*, *sly*, *muggy*, *ugly*, *rotten*, *cast*, *crawl*, *hit*, *rot*, and *skelp*. Even yet, they have a rude and barbarous sound, though they have been English for well-nigh a thousand years.

The French words which were incorporated into our language after the Norman conquest are very numerous. They belong to every sphere of life, and it is certain that Norman civilization, with its feudal system and its monastic orders, influenced English life considerably, and probably for the better. Our words *clear*, *pure*, *honest*, *brave*, *tender*, *gentle*, and *noble*, are French, and they express qualities of character for which the English had to borrow words to give them a meaning. So many words were borrowed from the French in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that it is impossible here to give lists of them. But I should like for a moment to consider some groups of typical words which came into English first from the French.

There were the technical terms of the new system of government: *crown*, *baron*, *parliament*, *exchequer*, *tax*, *people*, etc. There are military words such as *war*, *arms*, *soldier*, *army*, *duke*, *captain*, *siege*, and *battle*. There are the legal words such as: *justice*, *judge*, *assize*, *jury*, *plaintiff*, *defendant*, and *assets*. Nearly all the technical terms of English law are of Norman-French origin. There are words associated with field-sports and the tournament, such as

carry, catch, venison, archery, joust, herald, and combat. There are words associated with cookery, such as *roast*, *boil*, *fry*, *beef*, *mutton*, *pork*, *veal*, *dinner*, *supper*, and *feast*. There are the names of trades, such as *grocer*, *joiner*, *carpenter*, *butcher*, *tailor*, which in itself is a striking commentary on city-life in Norman times. Nearly all the names of trades and occupations are Norman-French, and the municipal records of old cities like London and Southampton were kept in Norman-French. Then there are a great many words which show how the Norman invasion affected the church. We could tell from the language alone, even if we did not know from history, that the Normans reformed the Anglo-Saxon church. Words like *parish*, *parson*, *pray*, *preach*, *duty*, *discipline*, *mercy*, *grace*, *abbey*, and *cloister* are due to their influence, as are the words which show their influence on the building of churches and monasteries, like *porch*, *pillar*, *arch*, *nave*, *choir*, *chancel*, *beauty*, *colour*, and *ornament*.

Now French was derived from Latin. French, originally, was the vulgar Latin spoken in France. It was perfectly natural, therefore, for the French to borrow fresh words from the Latin. The learned men of that day spoke and wrote Latin, and to them it seemed a more learned way of speaking French to say *amicable* than to say *aimable* or *amiable*, or to say *hospital* rather than *hostel*, or *rotund* rather than *round*. There grew up a learned Latin element in French, as well as a popular element. This process went on in England, too. The English clerks and scholars adopted a good many learned words which had been taken straight from the Latin of the church and from the Vulgate Bible. Before being made English, these Latin words were put into a French form; and it is often very difficult to



say whether a learned French word came into English from French, or was borrowed directly from the Latin. Sometimes in English we have two similar words, one derived from popular French, the other derived from Latin or learned French; and words such as *cattle* and *capital*, *pity* and *piety*, *dainty* and *dignity*, *poison* and *potion*, *ransom* and *redemption*, *treason* and *tradition*, are often known as "doublets."

The Latin element in English is very great. I do not know the exact figures, but I should imagine that in the English dictionary there are considerably more Latin words than native English. It began, as we have seen, in Anglo-Saxon times, but the number of borrowed words increased enormously in the Middle Ages with the growth of theology, philosophy and science. The learned men learned to borrow from Latin as we have seen, and from Latin they borrowed their theological and philosophical terminology. And ever since, we have used Latin as the source of our learned words, and to coin new words required to fit the new philosophical and scientific notions.

The sixteenth century, with its veneration for ancient Greece and Rome, and its love of classical literature, saw the introduction into English of still more learned words, chiefly from Latin, but partly from Greek. Some of these were introduced in their native form, and a few, such as *idea*, *sphinx*, *dogma*, *hero*, *terminus*, *index*, *genius*, *crisis*, *stratum*, and *locus*, have retained it, some still forming plurals in the Latin manner, like *crises*, *strata*, and *loci*, as if to show that they have not succeeded in becoming really English. But for the most part they have been made to look like words derived from the French, and it is hard to tell from their appearance alone whether they were

borrowed before or after 1500. There seems to be no limit to the words which may be introduced into English from Latin. The only rule—and it is, of course, an unwritten rule—seems to be that a borrowed word must end in a termination which already exists in the language. “Enorme,” for instance, from Latin *enormis*, was felt to be wrong, but *enorm-ous* has survived. “Celeste” (*L. cœlestis*) sounds foreign, even when it is used in modern English to name one of the stops of an organ, or as an adjective meaning sky-blue, but *celest-ial* is felt to be right. There is an odd uncertainty about verbs borrowed from Latin. Some come from the present stem, like *refer* and *determine*; others, like *relate* and *terminate*, are formed on the supine stem. Indeed, the ending *-ate*, originally an ending (in one conjugation of Latin verbs) of the supine and past participle, has become a living suffix in modern English; and words like *felicitate*, *camphorate*, and the slang word *spifflicate*, have been coined with it.

Many of our Latin borrowings have had as short a life as the may-fly, if, indeed, they may be said to have lived at all outside the learned brains of their sponsors. Who would now dream of using such far-fetched words as “eximious,” “sufflamine,” “stultiloquy,” “mulierosity,” or “immarescible”? Yet they have all been used by good writers. The writers of the first half of the sixteenth century were not a whit behind the pedants of the fifteenth in their love of what have been called “inkhorn terms.” And some of these borrowings occur in good literature, and have been included in our dictionaries. But against the few learned words that have died, we have to set the enormous number that have lived, not only in dictionaries, where often they occupy three-quarters of the page, but

in common speech and writing. The fact is, we cannot now dispense with our learned words. They have become too useful, for they have a precision which their English equivalents lack. Try to find an English word with the exact meaning of "anxious" or of "celebrate," "consequence," "declaration," "magnificent," "obedient," or "truculent," and you will find it a difficult problem, I am sure. However much we may on sentimental grounds regret the overwhelming of English by Latin, and the scholastic pedantry which made it possible, it is now too late to go back. For good or for ill, a large proportion of the words in the Latin dictionary have found their way into English, and they seem likely to remain. It leads to some surprising anomalies. We can speak of an "underground" train, but not apparently of an "undersea" boat; we can "forget" an umbrella, but we may not "forlearn" how to do a cube-root sum. The moon undergoes a "lunar," not a "moonish" eclipse; we do "hand-work" at school, but in the world it becomes "manual labour," and in prison they have another name for it still. So that to everyone who has not a wide knowledge of Latin and French, an English dictionary is a necessity.

It is hardly necessary to recount in detail the many borrowings of modern English from other languages. The scientists go chiefly to Greek for their new words, and whilst it is more than improbable that *oxygen*, the *telephone*, the *barometer*, *geology*, and *psychoanalysis* were known to the ancient Greeks, their names are simply new stones from an old quarry. From France we import the technical terms of fashionable dress for women, and *rouge*, *papier-poudré*, *modiste*, *ennui*, *migraine*, and those horrible words, *soirée*, and *serviette*, tell of the influence of modern French

manners. *Bandit, gondola, opera, mandoline, andante, allegro, stiletto, and macaroni* speak eloquently both of blue Italian skies and of Italian opera. *Don, armada, cigar, ranch, guitar, tornado, and vanilla* are Spanish. *Bazaar, orange, caravan, pagoda, and turban* are ultimately of Persian origin. *Amen, hallelujah, cherub, sabbath, and jubilee* are from the Hebrew, and came into English from the Bible. Most of these modern borrowings are either the technical terms of modern civilization or of fashion, or they are words which are used to give local colour; and, although we have made them English, they still for the most part feel foreign. Yet some words, such as *cigar* and *orange*, are now completely English, because the things for which they stand have become a part of English life; whilst others, such as *charabanc* and *automobile*—and I wish I could add *garage*—are already dying.

When we once realize something of the richness and variety of our native tongue, and that often it possesses several words for one notion or thing, it becomes not just "talk," but an instrument to play on. We find that it has possibilities of beauty, precision and force which we had not suspected. Of course, one can speak English all one's life without knowing a word of its history, but after a glimpse of its wonderful variety I hope you will agree that ordinary English is not only less *English* than is generally supposed, but less *ordinary*. A language where one says, "I began to do sums," and writes, "I commenced the study of arithmetic," is really a very wonderful language, almost unique.

There is often too great a gap between the English that we speak and the English that we write. The happy solution seems to be to make our conversation a little more formal and a little more exact, and our writing a little

less formal and dignified. We should all smile at the journalist who, in reporting a country show, would describe a fine lot of poultry as "a magnificent assortment of the feathered world," but we are all doing the same thing in a lesser degree every time we write a business letter. If we are careful about the way we habitually speak, we need not trouble about the way we write. And so, let us take the trouble to speak a language which is worth listening to, because our words are well chosen. Some people are misguided enough to think it silly to talk finely. But if you will think it over, it is language which distinguishes man from the brute beasts. Your dog would talk if he could, no doubt. But he can't! Language has grown with man. Civilization has simplified and enriched speech. The more civilized the race the richer the language! And there is no surer indication of intelligence and self-respect in a man than this, that he uses his language as if he understood it and loved it.

## II

### STANDARD ENGLISH

**S**POKEN languages are always changing. Usually it is a very gradual change, but it is there nevertheless.

And in the past, spelling has been revised from time to time so as to allow for the new kind of pronunciation. Most of you, I think, are learning French. Well, French was once Latin. French is the modern kind of Latin spoken in France. English is the modern kind of Germanic spoken in England, America, Africa and Australasia.

These are extreme instances, but they illustrate two things. One is that old words drop out of fashion and new words creep in. The other is that the ways of pronouncing words change, too. The change in one generation of English is hardly noticeable, but it is there nevertheless; and if you have an ear for this kind of thing, when you are old and come to look back on your youth, you will be able to notice it in some words. Let me illustrate.

Knives are things that alter their shape with fashion. We retain the general term *knife*, but there were quite a number of words for special kinds of knives, such as *sax*, which gave its name to the Saxons; *anlace*, which Chaucer mentions in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* as being worn by the Franklin; *hanger*, *thwitel*, and a host more which have completely died out. Similarly with the early names of artillery. *Culverins*, *demi-culverins*, *basilisks*, *petronels*, *carronades*, and even cannons are obsolete. We speak now of *guns* and *howitzers*. There

is a very interesting example of this in the name for a smartly dressed young man. In Elizabethan times he was known as a *gallant*. In the eighteenth century he was called a *macaroni*. In 1820 he was known as a *buck*, in 1840 as a *dandy*, in 1860 as a *swell*, in 1870 as a *masher*, in 1890 as a *toff*, and in 1915 as a *nut*. Even to-day, under our very noses, words are going out of fashion and new words are coming in. The word *physician* is giving way to *doctor*, *building* is superseding *edifice*. Why, if we could go back into the past only twenty generations we should find our ancestors living in the time of the great Middle-English poet, Geoffrey Chaucer. If you will borrow a volume of his poems and try to read them, you will find that a considerable number of the words which he uses have gone out of fashion, and a further number have changed their meanings.

Languages are always changing. The pronunciation of our own language, English, has changed enormously. Shakespeare's English, if we could borrow Mr. H. G. Wells's "time machine", and go back and hear it, would sound like a strange dialect to us. Let me write down for you, in something like Shakespeare's pronunciation, a fragment of a song from *The Tempest*.

Full fadom fayve they fæther lays;  
Of his bones air coral mæde;  
Those air pails that wear his ayes:  
Nuthing of him that duth fæde,  
But duth suffer a sea-chænge  
Into sumthing rich and strænge.  
Sea-nymphs owerly ring his k-nell.

The sound in *made*, *fade* and *change* was almost like the modern sounds in words like *mare* and *fare* and *chair*.

Next I want to introduce you to the language of the aristocracy in the year 1700. The following letter was written by Mrs. Bridget Noel, daughter of Viscount Camden to Lady Rachel Russel in July, 1700.

"I canot rest satisfied until I have an account how your lord dos, for I am extremely consarned to hear he has putt his ankel out of joynt. My sister Noel and I was at Burley yesterday. My lady Gainsborough met us at Burley, but in sutch a dress, as I never saw, without dispute. Her giengam manto is the worst of the kind. It is purpel, and a great dell of green, and a leetel gould, wich luks most abomenable. Mr. William Cecil was drest like a garle, and danced with Lord Burley, and put me in a mind of Lady Kathern in his dansen, for he maks a very prety garl, and dances very grasful. Mr. May is deed, or a-dying. He goot a fall off his horse wich will be the cause of his deth. I beg my humble sarvice to your lord, and my sarvice to Lord Roos and Lady Kathern and Master, and Lady Dorothy. I am, dear sister, yrs eternally to command, B. Noel."

Even in 1850, according to Lord Frederic Hamilton, it was possible to hear an old society lady talk like this: "The dook was obleeged by the hate to lave the bal-cony and set in a gyardin-cheer under the layloc-trees, where they brought him a dish of tay in chany cups, and some cowcumber sandwidges on goold plates."

Language is always changing. Pronunciation is slowly altering. Some words and phrases are falling into disuse. New words are coming into use. At present this is happening very slowly. But there have been times when English has changed very rapidly. It is probable that it would change more quickly in our age, were it not for two



facts that stand in the way and exert a reactionary influence.

✓The first of these influences is that of spelling. The spelling of English has been fixed by the printers for about two hundred and fifty years. The written English of newspapers and books is, with a few American modifications of spelling in use in the United States and in parts of Australia, common to all the English peoples. There is now an accepted standard of spelling fixed by the dictionaries. However we speak English—and we speak it in different ways, or at any rate we do not all speak it alike—however we speak English, we do all *spell* it in the same way. And this is my point. A fixed spelling acts as a brake on changes in pronunciation. Certain spellings indicate certain sounds, and tend to preserve those sounds from change. And so, changes in pronunciation are checked by the accepted spelling. Not only that, but words are pronounced as they are spelt. Old pronunciations are forgotten, and new spelling-pronunciations, based on the spelling, are introduced. Spelling has brought back the sounds of *h* and *wh* at the beginning of words. Spelling has changed *weskit* to *waistcoat*, and *sarvice* to *service*. This is particularly the case with proper names. Spelling has changed the pronunciation of Lunnon to London, Minyies to Menzies, and Jarsey to Jersey. People often say Derby and Derwent and Harewood. The old pronunciation is Darby, Darwint and Harwood. In America, I believe, Warwick has become War-wick, and Greenwich, Green-wich. Words tend to become pronounced as they are spelt.

The other fact is that there is one kind of spoken English which is generally regarded as the best, and this

particular kind of English has remained fairly constant for over a hundred years. I mean the language of educated people, of the stage and the aristocracy. It is known to those who teach English to foreigners as "Standard English." It is the kind of English which we ought to hear in school, at church, on the stage, and over the wireless. It is clear and easy to understand. Every syllable is clearly pronounced. There is no slurring over unaccented syllables and unemphatic words. It is a kind of English which of necessity must be suitable for public-speaking, and therefore it is clear without being noisy.

It differs from the other dialects of English chiefly in its vowels. Its vowels are pleasing to the ear, though as far as spelling is concerned, the vowels no longer correspond to the written symbols. There was a time when the long vowels of English differed only from the short vowels in being long. The change in the sound of the long vowels, which has turned several of them into diphthongs, began, it is supposed, about the time of Chaucer. Here are the vowel sounds of standard English.

There are seven short vowels:—

æ as in *cab* and *bat*. The sound æ is half way between the *a* of *carb* and the *e* of *keb*. The phonetic symbol for it is the diphthong æ.

ɛ as in *pet* and *said*.

i as in *pin* and *threepence*.

ʊ as in *hot* and *what*.

a as in *but* and *sun*. The sound *a* is almost the short vowel of the *aa* in *father*.

u as in *push*, *put* and *book*.

ɔ as in *the* and *away*. This is the so-called "obscure vowel."

The phonetic symbol for it is an *e* upside down.

There are five long vowels:—

*aa* as in *father*, *calf* and *aunt*.

*ii* as in *beat* and *thief*. This vowel is *i* + *i*, *ii*; not *əi*, as in *bait*, *thief*. Beware of making it *ei*, and of saying "sweits" for *sweets*.

*ɔ* as in *saw*, *walk*, and *corn*. This is the sound which is usually spelled *aw*. The phonetic symbol for it is *c* upside down.

*uu* as in *noon* and *fool*.

*ə* as in *bird*, *certain* and *turn*. This is the long vowel of the *ə* in *away*.

There are ten diphthongs:—

Six vocalic diphthongs:—

*ai* as in *time* and *right*. This diphthong consists of *a* + *i*, *ai*. Beware of making it *ɔi* as in "toime" and "roight."

*au* as in *house* and *round*. The diphthong consists of *a* + *u*, *au*. Beware of making it *æu*, as in "hæuse" and "raeund."

*ei* as in *lady* and *day*. This diphthong consists of *e* + *i*, *ei*. Don't lower it to *æ* + *i*. Don't say "lidy" and "dy."

*ou* as in *slow* and *note*. This diphthong consists of *o* + *u*, *ou*. Beware of making it *au*, as in "nowt" for *note*.

*oi* as in *toy* and *annoy*.

*ju* as in *few*, *use*, *new* and *tune*.

And four diphthongs derived from the consonant *r* preceded by a vowel:—

*eə* as in *fair*, *share* and *there*.

*iə* as in *fear*, *shear* and *here*.

*ɔə* as in *bore* and *four*.

*uə* as in *poor* and *sure*.

The diphthongs are important. The vowel in *school*, is a pure (*uu*) sound; not the diphthong (*ju*) as in "skewl,"

nor the French *u* (*y*) heard in the pronunciation of some Ulster, Cockney and Australian speakers. It need hardly be said that to pronounce *tie* as *toy* and *toy* as *tie*, and to say "now hayus" for *no house*, is a strong mark of regional dialect, as bad in its own way as "Coom, Dook!" for "Come, love!" You know the story of the school inspector who asked: "What is the French for 'to live'?" The answer came correctly—"vivre." "Good!" he said. "Now what is the French for 'to die'?" The answer was unexpected: "Aujourd'hui." The *i* (*ai*) in "a lidy kime tody" is very offensive.

Standard English also lengthens *a* to the *ah* sound (*aa*) before *f*, *s*, and *th*, as in *glass*, *path*, and *staff*. And it unrounds the short *u*-sound in words like *but*, *cub* and *rough*, to a vowel which is almost like short *ah* (*a*), except in a few words like *put*, *push*, *pull*, *bush*, *bull*, *butcher*, and *full*. These exceptions are one of the snags of Standard English. In the North Midlands the old rounded *u* (*u*) is retained in words such as "Run and put the butter in the cupboard." Whereas in Scotland and in the South of England the tendency is to unround every *u* to the short *ah* (*a*) sound, and this sentence would be pronounced nearly like "Ran and pat the batter in the cabbord." You may have heard of the Scotch rural schoolmaster who checked a boy for saying "butcher" [*but/ər*]. "Not butcher," he said, "batcher." The boy said, "Well sir, I've always heard it called butcher." "Oh! have you?" the teacher replied: "well, let us look it up in the dictionary." "Ah! Here it is," he said triumphantly, "Batcher, with *u* as in 'pat,' 'pash,' and 'pall.'" And hence it is that in borrowing the Scotch game of golf we have taken over the pronunciation "pat" for the operation of putting the ball

in the hole on the putting-green with a club called a "patter," but spelled *putter*.

Those are the vowels of standard English, but as a matter of fact there are many varieties of English spoken, even in England. If we were to travel in Great Britain, we should notice that there are many slightly different ways of speaking English,—dialects, they are called,—peculiar to different parts of the country. And these dialects differ to some extent in vocabulary and phrase, but the chief mark of difference is their vowel sounds. The fact is, not only is English spoken with a foreign accent by foreigners, but it is spoken with a number of variations by the English-speaking peoples. There are nine main regional dialects of spoken English in the British Isles alone, each with numerous varieties. And if you add to these the three dialects of America, South African English, and Australian and New Zealand English, you will see that there is an immense number of varieties of the English language.

One of these dialects is of particular importance and interest, because it has been the basis of the English spoken in Australia, South Africa and New Zealand, I mean the modern dialect of London. The population of London has always represented one-tenth, roughly speaking, of the population of England, and the dialect of English spoken there has been a blend of the dialects of South Eastern England, that is to say of the dialects spoken east of a line drawn from Portsmouth to Oxford, and Oxford to Ipswich. It has not affected the Yankee dialect of America, which seems to have a midland origin; but the London dialect has profoundly influenced the speech of the dominions of the southern hemisphere, which were colonized during the nineteenth century.

It is a dialect which has changed a good deal during the last hundred years. What south-eastern English was like a century ago may readily be seen from a perusal of the scenes in which the Wellers appear in *The Pickwick Papers*, and of Thackeray's *Yellowplush Papers*. The opening chapters of William de Morgan's novel, *Joseph Vance*, also contain passages in this dialect, characteristic marks of which were:—

1. Confusion of initial *v* and *w*: *wery* (very), *wittles* (victuals), *vell* (well), *vay* (way).
2. The introduction of an *a* before *o* and *ow* (*æu*): *nao* (no), *haous* (house). This appears to be an Essex peculiarity.
3. The insertion of *r* to prevent hiatus, as in "lor an' order", "he sor a man".

Since then the dialect has altered. The sounds of *v* and *w* are no longer confused, but some of the vowels have altered a good deal. The long *a* has become *i*, as in *tike* and *biby*. And the long *i* has become *oi*, as in *noice* and *hoigh*. This change has taken place since 1850. If you want to see what the dialect looks like nowadays, you will find examples in the *Barrack-Room Ballads* of Rudyard Kipling and in C. J. Dennis's *Sentimental Bloke*, though as a rule you have to turn *a* into *i*, and *i* into *oi*, to get the effect.

"Wot's in a name?" she sez.                      An' then she sighs,  
 An' clasps 'er little 'ands, an' rolls 'er eyes.  
 "A rose," she sez, "be any other name  
 Would smell the same."

Perhaps you can get the effect best, if we turn a couple of stanzas from Gray's *Elegy* into the modern Cockney dialect.

Naow fides the glimmering landskipe on the soight,  
End all the air a solemn stillness haolds,  
Sive where the beitle wheils his draoning floight,  
And draowsy tinklings lull the distant faolds.  
Sive that from yonder oivy-mantled taower  
The maoping aowl does tu the miuwn compline  
Of such es, wandering near her seicret baower,  
Molest her ineshent solitary rine.

Now there is nothing really wrong with that dialect. It has carried the diphthongs to excess, it is true, but it is only continuing a process which has already begun in Standard English. All the dialects of English, except the Scottish dialects, tend to turn the long vowels a and o into diphthongs. It seems to be a tendency of the language. But Cockney has one defect which is fatal. It is vulgar. To speakers of standard English it is either comic or common. It seems to say: "I am uneducated. I have no ear to imitate a good pronunciation when I hear it. I am lacking in taste and refinement." It is a dialect which, unlike Scotch or Irish English, is offensive. Speakers of standard English take up perhaps an unreasonable attitude, but the attitude is there, and objecting to it won't alter it. On the other hand, it may reasonably be argued that Cockney is a dialect which is harsh and unpleasant, as well as careless and slipshod.

If you don't speak like that, I would say don't try to. Avoid those diphthongs like poison. If you do tend to speak like that, try to speak standard English. Standard English can be acquired. If you want to see an example

of how it can be learned, read a very amusing play by George Bernard Shaw, called *Pygmalion*. There is a comparatively new science called phonetics, which analyses the sounds of speech and gives them symbols, and a phonetician can tell you how to shape the organs of speech so as to produce the sounds of any given language or dialect. In Shaw's *Pygmalion*, a professor of phonetics teaches a Cockney flower-girl the proper pronunciation of standard English. But then a further complication is seen. She pronounces it perfectly, but her grammar and her idiom are still vulgar. The professor has to go a stage further and teach her grammar and the polite idiom.

If you can learn the 22 vowel sounds of Standard English, there is no reason why your pronunciation shouldn't be perfect, if you will cultivate an ear for pronunciation, and imitate the pronunciation of the best speakers that you hear. But pronunciation is not everything. There are other habits of speech which you need to watch as well. Watch your grammar. A downright lapse of grammar, such as "we was," or "like he does," is as ugly as a bad accent. Speak clearly and distinctly. Get a dictionary which indicates the proper pronunciation, and learn to pronounce words properly. Choose your words well, and try to talk as intelligently as you can. It is not the trace of dialect which makes English unpleasant to listen to, so much as a careless, slipshod pronunciation, and a needy vocabulary.

Standard English is strongly influenced by the language of books. It borrows dignified words and literary phrases, and, unconsciously perhaps, its structure is moulded by the way in which the best English has been written. Its grammar is not perhaps precisely the grammar of the school-books, for, in conversation especially, a certain



amount of license is allowed; but a usage peculiar to dialect is felt to be as ugly as the misplacing of an h.

Now English is worth speaking well. A regional dialect is a good form of English, especially if it is really pure. But Standard English, or the King's English, as it is truly called, is generally regarded as the best dialect. Perhaps its chief merit is that it is current everywhere, whereas a regional dialect is current only in a certain district. But whatever dialect of English we speak, we can at least try to speak it clearly and distinctly. Some people who live in districts where there is a well-marked dialect find great difficulty in speaking the King's English, however much they try. They cannot rid their speech of certain dialect sounds, and some of them simply can't remember to pronounce their h's. Well, if you are one of them, don't worry about a trace of dialect. It is not a defect, unless you want to go on the stage, or to become a schoolmaster. No one thought the less of Sir Walter Scott because he spoke with a Scotch accent, nor any the worse of Burke because he spoke English with an Irish brogue. Some of the ablest men, both in London and elsewhere, speak English distinctly and well, but they speak it with an unmistakable trace of the region from which they come. It is not the trace of dialect which makes vulgar English unpleasant to listen to, but the careless, slipshod pronunciation and the needy and threadbare vocabulary.

So don't worry about your accent if you have one. None but a linguistic snob would dream of objecting to it. But there are some particular habits which are most important if one wishes to speak well. Our pronunciation ought to be clear. Our words ought to be well chosen. Speak clearly and distinctly. Get a dictionary which indicates the

standard pronunciation, and learn to pronounce words properly. If you are doubtful about the pronunciation of a word, look it up. Mind your h's. H is silent in a few words of French origin, such as *heir*, *hour*, *honest*, and *honour*; and to insert it here, or to drop it where it ought to be pronounced, is a disgrace which should bring a blush to the cheek. Never mumble or run words together. If you discover that you have a tendency to do this, speak as slowly and as distinctly as you dare.

English is a beautiful and expressive language in its highest form—aye, and in its dialects, too, when they are spoken finely and forcefully. English is worth preserving as pure as we can keep it, and worth speaking as finely as we can make it; and self-respect, and a desire to make it easy for other people to hear what we have to say, should urge us to pronounce it as carefully and as beautifully as we can. We cannot all speak as eloquently as the great orators and poets, but we can all practise a certain clearness in our speech. Some adjectives are overworked in every-day conversation, because people will not trouble to be exact. They call a man "a clever man", when they may mean anything from skill to learning. Or they say, "He's a fine man", when they may mean that he is either polite or honest, or even handsome. If you call a girl a "nice girl", *nice* may mean anything between good-tempered and pretty. There are swarms of such words: *marvellous*, *wonderful*, *ripping*, *priceless*, etc. Such words are best avoided, except in their true meanings, and it is well to remember that whatever "ripping" means, *decent* means seemly and *priceless* invaluable. They are paralleled by a similar host of adverbs: *awfully*, *fearfully*, *frightfully*, *terribly*, *absolutely*, etc., all of which are worn out by

overwork in ordinary conversation. Please don't forget the simple words: *very*, *truly*, and *really*. They mean the same thing, and they say it more plainly.

Some may argue that they couldn't speak at all if "topping" and "horrible", "awfully" and "frightfully", and such words, were to be debarred; just as some of our friends could not get along without a jargon which includes "expropriation", "exploit", and "proletariat". Well, there are times in the affairs of man when speech is silvern, but silence is golden. It is better to be silent than to talk rubbish. A thief once defended himself to Voltaire by urging that a man must live. Voltaire's reply was: "I don't see the necessity." And one might say the same about certain words. There is no particular necessity why they should be used. We could do better without them. Cultivate an ear for fineness in words, and never forget that every word has a meaning, if we will only trouble to find it out.

### III

#### CHANGE IN LANGUAGE

**L**ANGUAGES are always changing, and English has changed a great deal. That is a fact which I want to make you realize, though you see it dimly when you call Shakespeare old-fashioned. Languages change in three ways,—in their pronunciation, in the forms of words, and in the meaning of words. We can leave out changes of form in the case of English, for there are not many forms of the same word. An ending in *-s* to indicate the plural of nouns, or the third person singular of verbs, and a few verbal endings in *-en*, *-ed*, and *-ing* are just about all that remain from a much richer system of inflexion in Old English. But if we could go back in stages from A.D. 1400 (the language of Chaucer) to 900 (the language of King Alfred), and then back to 200 (the language of the West Germanic tribes), and then back to, let us say, 1000 B.C. (Primitive Germanic), we should find a steady increase in the grammatical endings of words. English has become more and more simplified, until, now, it has a bare minimum of inflexion.

But let us look into the other two changes, changes of pronunciation and changes of meaning. Firstly, the pronunciation. We have five vowels in our alphabet, which we call *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*. If we could go back to Chaucer's age, we should probably find that they had their original values. Words such as *name*, *cake* and *lady*, were pronounced *nahme*, *cahke*, and *lahdy*. Words like *green* and *seed* were pronounced *grain* and *sade*. *Time*, *pipe* and

*to like* were pronounced *teem*, *peepe*, and *leeke*. *Boat* was *bawt*, *goose* was *goce*, *town* was *toon*. The short vowels have kept their vowel-sounds, with one exception. The vowel in the words *but*, *sun* and *mutton*, used to be really an *u* sound, a sound which is retained in the Yorkshire and Lancashire pronunciation, which sounds rather like "boot," "soon," and "mootton". But the long vowels have gone through quite a succession of changes, and it seems improbable that they will retain their present pronunciations. *Name* and *time* are already *nime* and *toime* in certain influential dialects, and it would be unwise to prophecy what they will become in the distant future. One thing is certain. They will not remain "name" and "time" for ever.

Some of these changes are quite recent. If we could go back only a hundred years, we should find the words *castle*, *staff* and *bath* pronounced with a short *a*; and *soft* and *often* pronounced with a short *o*. But now these words are pronounced with a long vowel, *ah* (*aa*) or *aw* (*ʌ*). And we should hear some pronunciations which have quite died out. We should hear *chair*, *card* and *garden*, pronounced *chyare*, *kyard* and *gyardin*. We should hear the "hidgeous" pronunciations *injun* for *engine*, *obejience*, *ashume* for *assume*, and *shoot* for *suit*. Even in our own age, changes in pronunciation are still going on. Do you pronounce the word *lute* as *lewt* or as *loot*? How do you pronounce the word *poor*? Do you say *poor* or *paw*? How do you pronounce *pour*? Do you say *pore* or *paw*? There is a very noticeable change in words containing a diphthong before *r*, like *pure*, *fire* and *tower*. There is a very noticeable tendency to make them *pyaw*, *far* and *tar*. And if we could glance at *grammar*, we should see similar

tendencies at work. You would never dream of saying, "I writ," or "you was," or "ain't it?"; or "the shoe was a-mendin" for *the shoe was being mended*; and yet all these were perfectly good English in the middle of the eighteenth century.

I mention this, because people have a habit of thinking that English grammar and pronunciation are fixed. They assume that there is a correct form, a right and a wrong, and that if you are not right, you must be wrong. Now that is a false view. There is no absolute right and wrong in English pronunciation and grammar, that will endure for all time, and is correct. English is not a dead language, like Latin. English is a living language, and its pronunciation and its constructions keep altering. An English grammar is something based on the speech and the writings of educated speakers and writers. What else could it be based on?

Similarly, if you set out to acquire the knowledge of how vowels and consonants are produced, and how to record them, which is known as phonetics and is indispensable to every grammarian; and if you are sufficiently observant to note the grammatical forms in speech and writing, you can make a grammar of any English dialect, or of any native language. A man wrote to me the other day to ask whether "It is me" or "It is I" is correct. I replied that the equivalent of "It is me" would not be correct in Latin or German, but the phrase is correct in English, because educated people say it and write it. Another man wrote to ask whether it was correct to say "Hearts is trumps" or "Hearts are trumps." The answer is that in standard English "Hearts are trumps" is correct, because that is the standard usage; but

many dialects say "Hearts is trumps," and, for those dialects, "Hearts is trumps" is right. We want to grasp the fact that standard English is only one out of numerous dialects of English, and that pronunciation and grammar go together. It is absurd to teach aristocratic grammar and vulgar pronunciation. Just as absurd as to teach vulgar grammar and aristocratic pronunciation. If you want to be correct, it is just as important to speak well as to write well.

Secondly, let us look at changes in vocabulary, for it is in the gain and loss of words that linguistic change is most easily recognized. Words come into the language, and words drop out of use. Words come in two ways. They are coined, and the dictionaries give their aristocratic Latin or Greek components. Or they suddenly appear, as if from nowhere, and the dictionaries, in giving them a place, say, "etymology doubtful". Words suddenly come into English and have their long or short reign, as the case may be, in a most unaccountable way. Modern English teems with words that are little older than this present century. Some have been coined, not very happily always, by scientists and inventors—such as *antibody*, *vitamine*, *television*, *picturegram*, *dictaphone*, and *elevator*. Others have been borrowed from French, and are in themselves a striking tribute to the enterprise of the French in the development of the petrol-engine. This class includes words such as *automobile*, *chauffeur*, *garage*, *aeroplane*, *hangar*, and *fuselage*. Most of these words are quite unnecessary. Motorcar, driver, shed, airplane, and other English words of a familiar sound would have served the purpose just as well. But other words have just sprung up in English, as if from nowhere. Some of them are undoubtedly dialect

words, which would go back to unrecorded old English originals, if we could trace them. *Stunt* and *swank*, and perhaps *wangle*, are words of this type. Others have arisen from the mixing of languages in the United States, where they have come into general use, and have been transferred into the common stock of English. The word *loafer* is a word of this type. It has nothing to do with the word *loaf*, but it is derived from the German word *laufen*, to run. *Bonza*, if as is suggested, it is derived from the Spanish *Bonanza*, fine weather, is probably a gold-digger's word from California. Other words of this class are *guy*, *jazz*, *husky*, *tango*, *movies* and *talkies*. But there are other words, which seem to have no ancestry, words that have suddenly sprung up in the language as of from nowhere. They simply appear in the colloquial language, stay awhile, and then are either accepted into the literary language, or they disappear as mysteriously as they came. To give examples. Some such as *pug*, *bob*, *puke*, and *squeegee*, have already been granted a place in the dictionary. Others, such as *bally*, *squiffy*, *stoush* and *nut* (meaning an ostentatious young man) are still engaged in the struggle for existence. *Nigger*, *bus* and *mob* were once colloquial words of this kind. The Great War gave rise to quite a number of them in 1914-1918, words such as *scrounge*, *gadget*, *wangle*, *stunt*, *wash-out*, *dud*, *na-poo*, *wind-up*, *hot air*, and the like, but already most of them are being forgotten. In other words, they are dropping out of use.

Words drop out of use when the ideas for which they stand are forgotten, or when progress substitutes new ideas and new things with new names. Perhaps we can see how words fall into disuse, if we think of the mechanical improvements which have produced the pianoforte. The



earliest instrument, in which the strings were plucked by quills, was called the *virginals*. An improved type was called the *harpsichord* or *spinnet*. The introduction of dampers improved the tone, and the instrument was called the *pianoforte*, because it could play both soft and loud. Then playing was made mechanical, and the mechanical type was christened the *pianola*. The same thing has happened in guns. *Flintlock* and *musket* have given way to *rifle* and *machine-gun*. Sometimes the idea persists, but new words are used for it, which for a time are used side by side with the old ones, and then supersede them, like the historical series: *nim*, *take*, *steal*, *pinch* and *win*; or like the numerous words denoting the act of striking: *slay*, *hit*, *strike*, *bang*, *bash*, and the rest.

Let us glance at some of the words that have dropped out of use. There are thousands of them, and we can only look at one or two. Take the word *sake* which we retain only in the phrase *for the sake of*. It is a good old English word, which originally meant a quarrel. Then, under Norse influence, like the words *dream* and *bread*, its meaning was changed. It acquired the meaning of a law-suit. After the Norman conquest, when the legal language became Norman, the word was superseded in law by the word *cause*, or by *case*, and it lost its legal significance. But it clung on in everyday language, and still remains. In modern English, "for the sake of" is equivalent to "because of", but originally it must have meant "in the cause of".

Some words drop out of use because the ideas for which they stand are in some way objectionable, or offend against taste or morals. The Americans refuse to call a *cock* a cock. It is, they think, more genteel to call it a "rooster",

—awful name! When first-class girls' schools were first founded, some of them were called "ladies' colleges", because their founders thought the term more genteel than girls' school. So there are people who call a coal-scuttle a coal-vase, and a looking-glass a mirror. Others think it vulgar to use the words *sweat*, *spit* and *stink*. (They are the highly genteel people who call tooth-paste "dentifrice", and a napkin a "serviette"). They prefer the words *perspire*, *expectorate*, and *odour*. Some words, such as *sofa*, *servant* and *belly* are actually going out of use in favour of *couch* or *Chesterfield*, *maid* or *domestic*, and *stomach* or *abdomen*.

Some words don't drop out of use entirely, but they change their meanings. It is very interesting to see how secondary meanings develop out of the original meanings of words, and very often take their place. Take the word *lewd* for example. The word *lewd* originally meant a layman. It developed a secondary meaning of "ignorant" and "uneducated", in a time when the clergy were the only educated class. Later, when education became synonymous with refinement, *lewd* gradually became equivalent to "worthless" and "base", and hence "vile" and "vicious". *Vulgar* originally meant belonging to the common people. It therefore acquired a secondary meaning denoting "lacking in taste and refinement". And so the word *vulgar* became synonymous with "coarse and low", but we still retain its original meaning in "vulgar fractions", which means common fractions, and in the phrase, "the vulgar tongue". A similar change has affected the word *common*, which originally meant "general" or "public"; and now, to call a person's manners "common" is a deep insult; but we retain the earlier meaning of the word in "common

law", "commonwealth", and in the title of "The Book of Common Prayer".

A similar change is happening in America to the word *homely*. It originally meant "like home", as in the phrase "homely fare". And then, as *home* is sentimentally associated with simplicity and plainness, it acquired its English meaning of plain, simple and unpretentious. But the idea of simplicity is objectionable to the progressive and the refined. The word *simple* itself has changed its meaning from "one-fold" to natural, artless, ignorant, foolish and insignificant. And so, in America, the word *homely* has acquired a further meaning of "plain and ugly"; and the English lecturer who said in his address that he was "glad to see so many homely faces before him", scarcely met with the applause which he expected.

Similarly, the word *silly* once meant "blessed", with a secondary meaning "innocent", as in the phrase "silly sheep". And the word *blessed*, which has replaced it, may at times show signs of exactly the same kind of deterioration, as when a schoolboy says: "Look here! I simply can't get this blessed sum right". Probably but for the English translation of Our Lord's beatitudes, *blessed* would have acquired the same meaning as *silly*.

A similar change has happened in the words which mean "soon". It seems as if no word can retain the meaning of "immediately" in English for any length of time. *Soon*, which now means "in a short time", originally meant "in a moment", "immediately". But it lost its idea of promptness and was replaced by *anon*, which meant "in one moment", "straightway". *Anon* soon began to mean "after a while", and had to be replaced by *presently*, which soon suffered the same fate, and was replaced by *immediately*, which

we still use. *Presently* still means "immediately" in Scotland, but in England, such is the depravity of human nature, *presently* has undergone the change in meaning which will, sooner or later, overtake *immediately*. The phrases "in a minute", and "one moment", and "half a jiffy" have acquired the same notion of delayed action, and only the good old forceful word *now* really conveys the meaning of promptitude.

To *read*, originally meant to "give advice", and hence to read aloud law and interpret it. Its meaning has changed, with the spread of written documents, from reading aloud to reading silently to oneself and for one's own pleasure. To *write*, in the period when the early English first adopted the alphabet, meant to "scratch letters on wood", runes as they were called, with a sharp tool. Later it was applied to writing with a pen. It is a linguistic relic of the period when writing consisted of runic inscriptions scratched on wooden planks, and our word *book* is another form of the name of the tree called a *beech*, planks of beech being presumably the first writing material of the rude forefathers of our race. To *attach* originally meant to fasten with a "tach", or, as we call it, a tack. It meant "to tack together". Hence its secondary meaning of "to join," and its legal meaning of "to seize a person or his land." Another form of the same word is *attack*. To *attack* originally meant "to join battle", and hence the secondary meaning "to fall upon" or "to assault."

The word *pipe* was originally a word imitative of the chirping of birds, which was given to musical instruments such as the shepherd's pipe and flageolet. But as such instruments were tube-shaped, *pipe* came to mean a tube, or even a water-pipe. When the smoking of the Indian

weed, tobacco, was introduced from America to England, the long tube of white clay in which it was smoked was quite naturally called a *pipe*. And if you go into a shop to buy a pipe for your father to-day, they will sell you a short wooden pipe of briar or of cherry-wood; which may serve to remind us that new fashions and new inventions often carry old names, and some words may change their meanings simply by the march of human progress. Sometimes the improved thing receives a new name, as when the spinet gave way to the pianoforte, and the phonograph to the gramophone, but very often the old word survives with a new meaning. The word *bus* or *omnibus* was originally applied to a public horse-drawn vehicle with a coachman. The word *hearse* was originally a French name for a harrow. Its modern meaning is due to the fact that in medieval times the bier on which a coffin rested was fitted with spikes for candles, and so it looked like a harrow. It is a long development from that to a motor-hearse, but the name has clung to the vehicle, although it has become quite a different thing.

The word *sad* originally meant "fed to repletion", and hence having no appetite for more. Later it acquired a secondary meaning of serious, and, later still, sorrowful, and even mournful. From the language of farming, where to *feed up* means to "fatten", there came comparatively recently into English the past participle "fed up", which at first meant satiated, having no appetite for more, and in a secondary meaning, bored or even distressed. It has changed in the same way as *sad*. It is possible to say, "It's a serious matter, and I feel fed up about it". And by this time, perhaps, you are "fed up" with these wanderings in

the by-ways of English grammar. But I want to interest you in words.

Words are a constant source of interest. They tell us a great deal about the history of our civilization, and even about the history of thought. Every word had once an original meaning, and most meanings have a history. Many words, especially Latin words, speak in metaphors, like *extirpate*, which meant to "root up"; and *concatenate*, which meant to "chain together". A good dictionary is really a very amusing book. A good dictionary will tell you more than all the things I have been trying to say. It will give you the original form and meaning of the word, and tell you from what language it is derived. Many people never look at an English dictionary. That is a pity, for they miss a good deal of useful knowledge and a considerable amount of innocent amusement.

The pronunciation and meaning of the words that we use ought to be a source of inexhaustible interest for those who feel the beauty, and the imagery and the power of words. It is the spoken words which are the language. Speaking comes before writing, and there would be no writing and no reading, if there were no spoken language. The living language is the spoken language, which has altered a good deal, and will continue to alter. The English of Chaucer and Shakespeare and Scott and Browning is dead. What lives is the spoken language in all its varieties as it exists to-day. I want you to note its sounds, how they vary and how they have altered. Listen to the differences between the old and the young. Mark the differences of the English, Scotch, Irish, American and Australian varieties of English. If you are interested in the earlier stages of the present sound, you can learn a

good deal from the rhymes of the earlier poets. I want you to be interested in the words that we use. Track them down in the dictionary. Mark how their meanings have altered. You will find in the study of words an interest that is as romantic as history.

The living language is what men make it. It can be expressive or it can be meaningless. Dullards have a poor vocabulary. English consists of the spoken word, and it will be an ill day for English when English speakers cease to take a lively interest in their mother-tongue.

## IV

### THE SPELLING OF ENGLISH

THERE is an old story about a lady who bought some salmon at a shop. Whether it was fresh salmon or tinned salmon I can't tell you. But she bought it, and had it put down on the bill. When she went to pay the bill, she pointed out to the cashier that the article on the bill was wrongly spelt. The clerk had spelled the word s-a-m-m-o-n. "Sorry, ma'am," he said, "I've had to tell that boy before about his spelling. They don't teach 'em to-day in school like they used to do, when you and me was young. But we'll soon put that right for you." And taking his pen he corrected the word to p-s-a-l-m-o-n.

I mention that apocryphal story, because I wonder whether it has ever occurred to you to enquire why we call the fish "sammon", and spell its name *salmon*. Let me answer the question. *Salmon* is a Norman word, like *beef*, *mutton* and *veal*. The English word for salmon was *lax*. The Norman word was *samoun*, which came into English as "sammon", and so we got our spoken word. But in the sixteenth century, when grammarians became interested in the origin of words, they recognized that "sammon" was simply the English way of pronouncing the Latin word *salmonem*, and therefore they spelled the word with an *l*, and made their pupils spell it with an *l*, in order to show its Latin origin. That spelling in due time passed into the dictionaries, and is now the received spelling. And it is wrong. We can tell that our word is really the Norman word *samoun*, for if we had borrowed it directly



from the Latin, we should now be pronouncing it with a long *a*, as in *calm*, *palm*, and *psalm*.

This is an example of a Latinizing tendency that was at work in the sixteenth century. There was once quite a passion for giving learned forms to French words. The earlier forms of the words *debt* and *doubt* had no *b*. You will find that they are spelled *dette* and *doute* in Chaucer's works. But the Elizabethan grammarians connected the words, quite rightly, with the Latin words *debitum* and *dubito*, from which the French words *dette* and *doute*, the ancestors of our *debt* and *doubt* were derived. And to indicate their origin they inserted a *b* in the spelling. Similarly, the early form of the word *fault* was *faute*, borrowed from the French. But the grammarians derived it from the Latin, and connected it with the verb *fallere*, to deceive or offend; and they put an *l* in the French word *faute* and made it *fault*. And what is more, unlike the *l* in *salmon*, that *l* has changed the pronunciation of the word from *faute* to *fault*.

The fact is, there is a difference between spoken English and written English. Written English might be spelled so as to represent the pronunciation, but if it were, there would be no accepted standard of spelling, for different people pronounce English in different ways. English spelling represents the language as it was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Since then the standard pronunciation has altered, and new dialects have developed in America and Australia, but, owing to the fact that English spelling was fixed by custom and the dictionaries at the end of the seventeenth century, there is not so much difference in the spelling of English as in its pronunciation.

Some people think it is a pity that there is a distinction

between spelling and pronunciation. They wish that English were pronounced as it is spelt, as are Latin and German. Only, instead of bringing the pronunciation into line with the spelling, which would not be very difficult, and would make English pronunciation both purer and richer, they always want to bring the spelling into line with the pronunciation, which raises very great difficulties. It certainly would be a good thing if spelling could be reformed. Phonetic spelling would certainly make spelling and pronunciation easier. But on what pronunciation of English would you base your reformed spelling? A reformed spelling that would suit standard English would certainly not correspond to Scottish, or American, or Australian English. To devise a reformed spelling for English would be a very difficult task. It would be necessary to standardize our modes of spelling, still keeping the seventeenth century convention of spelling the vowels and diphthongs, which have altered so much that they no longer correspond as symbols to the sounds which they were devised to represent. And any system of reform has grave disadvantages. Modified reform, such as I have suggested, would make all the great writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seem as antiquated as Chaucer and Shakespeare in their original spelling.

Complete reform, in other words phonetic spelling, would split English into a number of dialects, as it was in the Middle Ages, and make literary intercourse between England, America and Australia much more limited than it is now. The English-speaking nations would drift farther apart, and each would be compelled to develop its English in its own way. That has happened once in the instance of Latin; and French, Italian and Spanish are the result.

It may happen to be the ultimate fate of English, but it is a thing to avoid, if it may be avoided. Unreformed English is a bond of friendship and sentiment and racial idealism. Think of that when English spelling vexes you, for it has its advantages, illogical though it be.

Now how did English spelling develop? It is a long and complicated story, and I can only tell it briefly. Our Anglo-Saxon forefathers spelled Old English phonetically. Every sound in the language was represented by its own letter or group of letters. As a system, the spelling of Old English was not quite perfect, but it was consistent. And therefore we know with perhaps greater certainty how King Alfred pronounced his English, than how Shakespeare, or Pope, or Queen Victoria spoke theirs. When the Normans conquered England, Norman-French conquered English. English lived on as a spoken language, spoken in a vulgar and careless way by churls and villeins who could neither read nor write. Dialectal differences increased in different parts of the country, and English became simply a number of peasant dialects. When learned clerks ventured to write in English so that the common people could understand them, they had to devise methods of spelling it, for the language had altered so much that it was in need of a new system of spelling. The earliest writers of Middle English, as this post-Norman development of English is called, spelled it as they pronounced it, and they spelled it after the French system of spelling which they had learned at school, where French was the language of instruction.

There was no uniformity about the spelling of Middle English. Every locality had its own dialect. Every writer had his own peculiarities of spelling. But in every dialect

Middle English was much influenced by French ways of spelling sounds, and even to this day we have retained some marks of this influence, for example, the *ce* in *once*, the *oi* in *joint*, the *ou* in *doubt*, the *qu* in *queen*, and the *ui* in *bruise* and *fruit*. But this is my point. There was no mode of spelling in the later Middle Ages common to all Englishmen, and to English speakers in Scotland and Ireland, until a new King's English and a traditional way of spelling it arose in London at the end of the fourteenth century. Chaucer, Gower and Wycliffe made the London dialect illustrious.

The King's English,—the English of the court, the civil service of Westminster and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge,—became the standard literary dialect. And with the coming of printing at the end of the fifteenth century, London became the seat of the production and the sale of books. It was printing that led to the standardization of spelling. At first, the printers spelled English very much as the scribes who had copied the manuscripts of Chaucer's poems had spelled it. But during the sixteenth century spelling was modified to fit the language, which had altered in pronunciation and was in process of becoming modern English. The Elizabethan printers developed a method of spelling English which was based on the traditional spelling of the London dialect; and though it was by no means regular and consistent, it was, roughly speaking, phonetic. It is the immediate ancestor of our own system of spelling. It was the Elizabethan printers who brought into general use the spelling *ea*,—the spelling *ea* being used to distinguish the vowel in words like *feat* (which they pronounced "fate") from that in words like *feet*. They also devised the spelling

*oa* to distinguish the vowel in words like *boat* from that in words like *boot*.

But in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries there was no authority which insisted that words should be spelt only in one particular way. There was a traditional way of spelling most words, but there was also a certain amount of freedom. To some extent, authors and printers spelled as they liked. There were also two forces which affected the traditional spelling. On the one hand, learned grammarians insisted on spelling *doubt* with a *b*, *island* with an *s*, and *scythe* with a *c*, regardless of the pronunciation. On the other hand, writers ignorant of the traditional spelling insisted on spelling as they pronounced, and so *sterre* and *ter* became *star* and *tar*, *yeve* became *give*, *werk* and *swerd* became *work* and *sword*. The pronunciation of English had changed, but, owing to the tradition of spelling, Elizabethan spelling never became really phonetic. For instance, the sound indicated by the spelling *gh* was probably silent in London English in Shakespeare's lifetime. Otherwise the printers would never have been able to spell the word which Chaucer spelled as *delyt*, d-e-l-i-g-h-t. But though the sound was silent in words like *taught*, *plough* and *night*, the traditional spelling was retained, and we still retain it as a relic of a time when *gh* was a symbol for a sound like the *ch* in the Scotch pronunciation of *loch* and *nicht*, or the German pronunciation of *ach*. The Elizabethan attempt to reform spelling was never fully carried out, and, approximately, English spelling had become what it is now, by about 1650. For, after 1600, the plural ending in *-es* was reduced to *-s* after a consonant, as in *arms* and *ears* and *weeks*, which in Shakespeare's time were still spelt *armes*, *eares*, and *weekes*; though we still retain the ending

in *-es* after *s*, *sh*, and *ch*, as in *asses*, *ashes*, and *watches*. And the final *-e*, which had disappeared in pronunciation during the fifteenth century, disappeared also in spelling, except where it indicated a preceding long vowel, as in *face* and *stone*; or indicated that *c* has the pronunciation of *s*, as in *once* and *commerce*, and that *g* has the *dʒ* sound, as in *cage* and *siege*; or indicated that *l* is syllabic, as in *fiddle* and *rattle*.

The spelling of the printers at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century was accepted by the makers of the dictionaries which were compiled in the eighteenth century, and it became the standard received spelling. Dr. Johnson's *Dictionary*, published in 1755, practically fixed English spelling, for it became the recognized authority on the spelling of English. Since then very few changes in spelling have been made. The old form of *s*, which looked rather like *f*, has given way to the form we know. We no longer spell *chemist* "chymist", nor *siren* "syren". "Theater" has been influenced in spelling by the French word *théâtre*. The words ending in *-ick*, like *music*, *physic*, *didactic*, *lunatic* and *Frederic*, have lost their final *k*. Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1828, standardized the spelling of words ending in *-our*, and *-re*, as *-or* and *-er* for the United States, and popularized such spellings as *labor*, *honor*, *center* and *meter*, but they have never been generally accepted in the British Empire. Certain writers of the nineteenth century have at various times spelled the final *-ed* of weak verbs as *-t* after voiceless consonants, as in *leapt* and *tost*, and after *l*, *m* and *n*, as in *spelt*, *dreamt*, and *learnt*. Others have attempted to reform the spelling of certain words, and have spelt *landscape* as "landskip",

*foreign* as "forein", *sovereign* as "soveran", and *catalogue*, *programme* and *cigarette* without their two last letters. But they have had little or no success.

The fact is, spelling-reforms made without the authority of a learned body, and without the sanction of a great dictionary, have but little chance of acceptance. If we could only revise the dictionaries, spelling-reform would be easy; provided that we were content with merely modifying the received spelling, and were not die-hards with respect to phonetic spelling. It would be necessary to correct the pedantic spellings, such as *debt* and *doubt*, *island*, *scent* and *scythe*. It would be necessary to revise such foolish spellings as *foreign*, *people*, *parliament*, *porpoise*, *biscuit*, *conduit*, *would*, *should*, *could*, *queue*, *quay*, *gauge*, *gaol*, *buoy* and *yacht*. It would be a good thing to spell *ea* as *e*, when the vowel is short, as in *leapt*, *heard* and *lead*; and to spell *ie* always as *ee*, in words like *siege*, *field* and *grief*. *Sovereign* and *foreign* would be better spelt with *-ain*. They seem to have been confused with the word *reign*. *Delight* has no connection with light, and would be better spelt "delite". *Style* and *tyre* should be spelt with an *i*. *Could* ought to be spelt without an *l*. The error arose because it was associated with *would* and *should*, which contain an *l* that was pronounced by many people only a hundred years ago. *Some* and *come* are relics of a time when *u* was written *o* before *m* and *n*. They might with advantage be spelt *sum* and *cum*. *Tongue* is an old English word, originally spelt *tunge*. It seems to have been confused with the French word *langue*. There should be no *h* in *ghost* and *ghastly*; and no *w* in *whole*, *whoop* and *whooping-cough*. We might very conveniently spell *s* sometimes as *z*,

not only in verbs ending in *ize*, like *civilize*, but also in words such as *praise* and *chosen*.

These are just a few of the crimes of the received English spelling. I am not pleading for phonetic spelling. That, I think, would be too drastic an alteration. I believe in the study of phonetics, and I think a phonetic notation is essential for the recording of pronunciation. But for a language like English, we need a standard spelling; and, since there are so many types of pronunciation, that spelling must be conventional. What I am urging is that our dictionaries need reforming. The dictionary is a tyranny. We are not allowed to spell correctly, even if we want to. And yet, until our spelling is reformed, we must all follow the spelling of our dictionaries. We must all spell in the same way, or we shall spend a great deal of time puzzling out each other's scripts. A standard received spelling which obtains everywhere, even if it be faulty at times, is undoubtedly a need in every language. Otherwise communication in writing is laborious, slow and difficult. For this reason I am against private and local endeavours to reform spelling. I am prepared to wait until English spelling is reformed by a committee of authority. If I were an American, I should spell *labour*, "labor", and *centre*, "center"; but as I am not, I prefer the English way. What is good enough for the philologists who compiled the greatest dictionary in the world, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is good enough for me.

Watch therefore your spelling. Unorthodox spelling is a sign either of carelessness, or of ignorance. Make a mental note of difficult words. If necessary, write them down in a notebook, and learn them. Have a dictionary of your own. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* is a very good short



dictionary, and the best commentary on it is Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*. When you write, and are in doubt how a word should be spelt, look it up in your dictionary. Spelling, correct spelling I mean, is a necessity and a duty. We owe it to ourselves for the sake of decency. We owe it to our friends for the sake of politeness. And we owe it to the Empire to which we belong for the sake of that most potent bond, the English language, which is our common heritage.

## V

### THE ESSENTIALS OF GOOD WRITING

I WANT you to think about English Composition. And the thing which I am going to say is rather horrid, but I want to shake you up out of the awful lethargy that seems to afflict the study of English.

I am going to say that, thinking in terms of hundreds of years and not in life-times, English is the most important subject you learn at school, and writing English with the ambition to write something someday that the world will not willingly let die, is the noblest ambition that you can have. Just think for a moment of the greatest nations of the past. What are they? Egypt with its pyramids and hieroglyphics? India with its gods and temples and its sacred cow? China with its rice, tea and silkworms? Mexico with its Aztecs and Mayas? No, they are three, and three only. Palestine with its Hebrew *Bible*. Greece with its Homer, and its dramatists and philosophers. And Rome with its historians and poets. China I rule out because, although it has a literature, it has not influenced the rest of the world.

Now the striking thing about that short list is that two of those nations, Palestine and Greece, were politically weak, and economically poor. Yet they have influenced the world profoundly. In religion, the *Bible* has been the most potent book that the world has ever known. In philosophy, Plato and Aristotle are still living inspirations. In poetry, Homer and Greek tragedy are still the admiration of scholars and the despair of poets. And that

## THE USE OF ENGLISH

is my point. It is not imperial power which necessarily makes a great nation. It is not wealth and luxury. But it is the possession of a great literature, and noble thinking, fine imagining and the right kind of feelings, which makes a nation great.

Wealth and power have a habit of coming and going. Science is superseded every fifty years, and the old names are forgotten as they are buried under newer and deeper knowledge. But the great poets and philosophers and dramatists never become antiquated, for as Keats rightly said: "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever". And that is what I mean when I say that English is the most important subject that you learn at school. And the horrid thing I am going to say is this. You are not taking it seriously enough. You are not patient enough to keep on slogging away at improvement. You get irritated when people criticize your feeble and inefficient work. You have a very poor idea of perfection, and you don't seem to care whether you reach it or not.

Now that is rather a horrid thing to say, and I want to tell you why I said it. I want to spur you to read more, and to read as many of the great books of the past as you can lay hands on. You haven't read enough, and you don't read enough. Read as much history, and biography and travel as you can. You can't read too much. Get to know something about the world, and its history, and its peoples and its problems. Read a few novels by all means, but choose good standard novels and historical novels if you can. Get a note-book, and keep a list of the books you read. Write short notes on each great book that you read. Any help to good reading is worth while.

I wonder if I dare recommend a few books which I

think you ought to read. I am choosing stiff ones, because I want you to learn to read hard books. Anyhow, here they are:—

Macaulay's *Essays*.

Wells's *Outline of History*.

Conan Doyle's *Through the Magic Door*.

G. K. Chesterton's *Life of Charles Dickens*,

and lastly, for a book of poetry,

The *Poems* of Matthew Arnold.

They are not everybody's choice, but they will serve. I want to start you on a lifelong career of reading. You don't finish learning when you leave school. You are just beginning. You have been learning how to begin. Now you have to go on as you have begun.

Perhaps you wonder why I want you to read more, and to keep on reading. Well, this is the reason. I want you to write well. I want you to have something to say. And the best aid to good writing is to have a well-stored mind. You may be very original. You may be full of ideas. But crude originality is not enough. You need to have something behind it. You need to have the sense of proportion which comes from reading. "Reading maketh a full man," said Francis Bacon. Reading shows a man splendours that he had not dreamt of, and reading gives one not only memories, and things to think about; but a sense of fineness and fitness. Reading makes us critics of our own work, and until we have learned not to be satisfied with anything short of the best that we can do, we shall never write well. The first essential of good writing is good reading.

And now, having said that, I want to talk about writing. We can't write at all unless we have something to say. That is where reading helps. When there is an essay to write, the one who reads can jot down twenty ideas on the subject where one who doesn't read can only find three. But I am not going to talk about how to write an essay. I am going to assume that somehow or other you can put an essay together, or tell a simple story, or write a description. I am going to talk about style. I am going to talk about the qualities of good writing.

Why do authors write? There are various reasons, I think. But for convenience let us think of three. We may write to communicate our thoughts to others. We may write to persuade people that our opinions are correct. Or we may write to charm people with the fineness of our thoughts and the beauty of their expression. Most people have an object in setting pen to paper; and speaking generally, we may say that the main object of prose writing is *persuasion*. If our writing succeeds, it will have some influence on those that read it. It will interest them and persuade them. If, for any reason, we fail to grip our reader, in that respect we fail in what we set out to do.

With that in mind, let us consider what are the essentials of good writing. I take it for granted that we must write grammatical English, and that our spelling must be correct. That goes without saying. There are two qualities, I think, which come first amongst many others, *clearness* and *precision*. We write to be understood. We must be understood before we can persuade. We must make our meaning clear. We must say exactly what we mean, taking care to use the right word. The laundress, for example, who advertised that she "wanted washing," was quite clear in

her own mind as to her need, but she failed to communicate her thought properly. Our first care must be to be *clear* and *lucid*. Think clearly, or as clearly as you can. Then see that you choose the right words to express your thought, and see that you get the right words in the right order. To be *precise*, we must say exactly what we have in mind, neither more nor less. *Precise* means not only exact, definite and accurately expressed; it implies the cutting out of superfluous words. To attain precision, we must revise our writing, compressing, checking exaggeration, and cutting out unnecessary statements. Better still, we may attain precision by training ourselves to think so clearly that revision is unnecessary. The ideal of precision is a maximum of sense in a minimum of words.

Clearness and precision come first, but a style that was clear and precise, and nothing more, would be very plain and dry. We are writing for an audience, even if, as in the instance of a letter, or an examination paper, it is only an audience of one. We have to interest that audience. We must try to make our writing *interesting*. We must try to be fresh and original. We must avoid inaccuracy and absurdity. We must cultivate *order* and *coherence*. The thoughts and arguments must follow on, and if we can make them lead up to a climax, so much the better. But if we want to please our audience as well as to interest it, we must try to write gracefully. Here reading helps enormously. Indeed, I think a sense of style can only be acquired by reading. From reading we acquire a feeling for the rhythmical swing of words and phrases, and the pleasant concord of words. Reading helps us to summon metaphors, and to make apt comparisons. Reading gives

us illustrations and allusions. So we are back again where we began. I want you to read more.

If you feel that your writing stands in need of greater clearness and precision, you cannot do better than write with a dictionary always at hand. Get hold of a good dictionary, one that gives you the derivations of words as well as their current meanings. An English dictionary is just as necessary to you when you are writing English, as is a Latin or French dictionary when you are writing Latin or French. You need it to fix the meanings of words, to help you to decide between two synonyms. You need it probably also to check your spelling. But above all you need it to help you to use correctly those words which you have met in your reading, and which you half know, but not quite.

The best books of instruction in the art of writing are the works of the great English writers. When you have read them for pleasure, read them again to see how they do the trick. Indeed, it is not a bad idea to try to imitate the style of a great writer who has a well-marked style. You could imitate or parody Goldsmith, Johnson, Macaulay, H. G. Wells, or Stevenson. I mention Stevenson, because that is how Stevenson learned to write.<sup>1</sup> He imitated the style of the writers who pleased him at the moment—Montaigne, or Browne or Hazlitt—and that is how he learned to write with some idea of harmony and grace. Some may think that imitation is a bad thing, that it would lead to insincerity, and would check the natural development of your own idiom. I don't think you need worry about that. Imitation won't give you ideas. It won't give you anything to write about. It will only give

1. See Stevenson's *Memories and Portraits*, IV, "A College Magazine."

you an idea of how to treat a subject when you have got something to write about. And in any case, you will soon tire of it. You can't go on imitating other people's style all your life. But if by imitation you learn some of the tricks of the trade, some of the graces and artifices of the literary art, it seems to me it won't do you any harm, and it may do you a lot of good. See how the great writers put their sentences together. Watch their mode of paragraphing and their punctuation. Note how they gain their effects, and try to create similar effects.

When you have done that, practise writing in your own idiom. *Practice writing every day.* You can't learn writing by intuition. It can only be learned by practice, revision and re-writing. I am thinking now of holidays rather than workdays. I quite realize that when you are busy with other things, you haven't much time for experimenting in the art of writing. But holidays are the time for reading. Holidays are the time when one reads the book that one has not before had time to read. And holidays give you a chance of really trying to write. You might keep a holiday-diary. A holiday-diary, nicely written up in a book and illustrated with humorous verses and illustrations, or even with prosaic photographs, is really a very jolly thing, something that you will look at in after years with great pleasure. You will certainly write letters; and letters can be made very interesting. I wonder if you know Stevenson's *Letters*, or Lamb's *Letters*, or White's *Selborne*. If you don't, I can recommend them. They are excellent reading. If you are more ambitious, you can try your hand at essays and short stories. Try writing verse, too, if you feel that you want to. The writing of verse will give you a facility which will help your prose.



Practise writing regularly, and if possible daily. Writing is an art, like painting or playing the violin, and it can only be learned by practice. The technique of writing can easily be lost, if you give it up. Writers of the first rank owe their proficiency to practice as well as to genius. No great writer has ever achieved a masterpiece without agonizing labour at some period of his career. Even Macaulay, who seems to write so easily, spent days in collecting his material, hours in sketching out a skeleton framework, and then more days in amplifying this into the famous essays, which are so vigorous and delightful.

*Never mind eloquence.* If we can attain clearness and precision, the command of an abundant supply of words, and ease and fluency of writing, eloquence will come without being looked for. Eloquence is the expression of passionate sincerity. It is futile to strive after eloquence. Those who try to be eloquent merely become pompous and grandiloquent. Don't try to be grand. Trying to be grand in writing is just as pretentious and silly as trying to be something better than you really are in daily life. Try to say directly and sincerely exactly what you mean. Leave the graces and the grandeurs until they come unsought. Grandeur depends ultimately upon a great inspiration and a magnificent subject. Eloquence springs from deep and noble feelings. When you think finely and feel nobly and sincerely, you will influence people and persuade them. And that is the best kind of eloquence.

And now we are going to jot down some qualities of good writing. What are the essentials of good writing? And which are the primary and essential qualities, and which come second? Note them carefully, and think it

over, because it is quite likely that I may leave some out. This is my list.

1. *Handwriting*. Since you are writing to be read by someone, your handwriting must be as legible as possible. Common politeness demands that. Giving a reader a communication that he can't read, is like entertaining a guest with food that he can't eat.

2. *Spelling*. Good spelling is necessary to good English. Bad spelling is comic. If you can't spell, use a dictionary.

3. *Punctuation*. Punctuation is an aid to clearness. Punctuation is a form of tidiness. People who won't punctuate are like people who leave their shoe-laces undone.

4. *Grammar*. English is written in a certain way by educated people, and if you don't write it in that way, you stamp yourself as uneducated. This is not a crime, but it is a very great disadvantage. Look out for grammatical errors, and avoid them.

5. *Clearness and precision*. Your writing should be as lucid as you can make it. Clearness in writing depends mainly on two things, the right word and the right order. The proper place for the word is just as important as the proper word. You can't write clearly unless you think clearly. Think before you write.

6. *Something to say*. The world is full of things to write about. Keep your eyes and ears open. Look and listen. Imagine stories about people and places. And above all read good books. Then think about things, and you will never lack something to write about.

Those seem to me to be the essentials. When you have acquired them, or when you realize what you have to acquire, you can proceed to improve your style. I want to

give you now in conclusion three hints on improving your style.

1. *Always have a point to make.* Show something. Prove something. Set a problem, and answer it. Introduce your subject, and then lead up to some definite point. When you have made your point, you can finish as soon as you like.

2. *Cultivate a love of words.* Master their present meanings and their original meanings, too. Note the association of the meaning of words like *home*, *red*, *captain*, *flag*, and others which open up a train of imaginative ideas. Mark the effect of the sound of words.

3. *Vary the lengths of your sentences.* Vary the rhythms of your sentences.

And, lastly, *criticise your work.* Don't be afraid to cross out passages, to re-arrange, and even to re-write if necessary. If a thing is worth doing at all, it is worth doing well. Let your resolve be: "Nothing but the best." Aim at distinction.

## VI

### THE WRITING OF SENTENCES

**W**RITING of any kind is just a succession of sentences. Most people don't trouble about the structure of the sentence. They just write it down as it comes into their head. Yet much of the grace of good writing depends on the way sentences are put together; and if you want to write well, you will be well advised to keep in mind Coleridge's definition of poetry: "the best words in the best order." The best words in the best order is a definition which applies just as much to prose as to verse.

Let us think first of the words. Much depends on the use of the exact word. Try to find the word which exactly expresses the idea which you have in your mind. You will find, I think, that the most helpful words in this respect are nouns, adjectives and verbs. If I say "it was night", I don't tell you very much. There may have been moonlight. But if I say, "it was an intensely dark night", you gather that it really was very dark. Get your conception clear, and then try to find the word which exactly expresses the idea which is in your mind. Don't say he crossed the road, if you mean that he *ran*, or he *strolled*, or he *hobbled* across the road. Don't say he hobbled, if you mean that he *shuffled*. There is a right word for these things. The right word is direct and forceful. It hits the nail on the head. If you keep on finding the right words, your writing will be forceful. And whilst there is little use in being forceful until you have learned to be clear, if by practice

you have learned to be both clear and forceful, you have learned a good deal of the art of writing.

Before you write down your sentence, think it over in your mind, and make certain that it is going to express just what you mean. This is very difficult. It means constant self-criticism. It is so very easy to say something that we do not really mean. There is a difference in meaning between: "Naturally, she spoke to him" and "She spoke to him naturally". Don't write *expect* if you really mean either "suspect" or "believe". Synonyms, that is, words that have almost, but not quite, the same meaning, are one of the characteristics of our language, compounded as it is of English, French and Latin. Synonyms are also one of its difficulties, for each word has its own peculiar meaning, and it should be used in its proper sense. Take the verbs *ask*, *beg* and *request*, for instance. They all mean very much the same thing. Yet one *asks* advice, *begs* a shilling, and *requests* a favour. Or consider the words that denote carrying. We *transport* a load, but we *bear* a burden. We *transfer* a business, but we *translate* a bishop. We *bear* pain, but we *suffer* hardship and *endure* fatigue. The proper use of such synonyms can only be learned by reading good literature.

There are three classes of words that you would be wise to avoid. I will name them, and then define them. They are: colloquialisms, jargon, and bombast. *Colloquialisms* are sometimes wrongly called slang, which was originally the special language of pedlars, tinkers and thieves. But colloquialism is a wider term than slang, and it includes common ungrammatical and vulgar usage. For instance, in the common life of this imperfect world it is not impossible for the garden-gate to be left open, and

the dog let out. "I expect it was you," says the sister to the brother. She doesn't really mean expect. She means "believe" or "suspect". That is a colloquialism. Properly used, to *expect* means "to look forward to". Similarly, an "individual" is not strictly speaking a name for a person. It means one person contrasted with a family or a class. "He is an individual that I can't stand" is, in literary English, "He is a person that I dislike intensely". As for slang, it is vulgar by nature. It is of no literary value, except in fiction for some special effect in dialogue. As a rule, it is to be avoided, because it vulgarizes and degrades style. Yet slang has crept into literary English in spite of the feeling against it, and probably will continue to creep in. "Nigger" was once a slang word, so were "sham" and "stunt", but these are rare exceptions. It is best to avoid the use of slang entirely, except in reproducing the dialogue of speakers who use it.

*Jargon* means the use of unintelligible words. It is often a form of pretentiousness. Really it is rather stupid to write "He was obsessed by a meticulous regard for accuracy" instead of "He was thoroughly truthful," unless a humorous effect is intended. Don't use an unfamiliar word until you have looked it up in the dictionary to see what it means, and then use it properly. *Meticulous* doesn't mean careful. It means "subject to little fears", worried about minute details. Others speak of a thing *functioning*, when they mean that it "works." Don't think it is fine writing to use a learned or a foreign word instead of a simple one. It isn't. Use familiar English in preference to unintelligible and imposing words, but remember that learned words have their uses. Words of Latin origin often have a precision of meaning and a

dignity which makes them indispensable. Examine any great stylist, and you will find that he uses learned words freely. It seems to me that there are two classes of words to be avoided; firstly, the technical language of sport, science and war. I mean it seems to me better to say in ordinary literary English "Consumptive patients are nursed in special hospitals" than to say "Tubercular patients are treated in special sanatoria." The language of baseball, botany and archaeology seems to be sadly afflicted with this kind of jargon. And secondly there are the words and phrases which are so common that they have lost their meaning. There is a group of epithets denoting "excellence" which have entirely lost their precise significance. I mean words like *gorgeous* and *absolute* and *marvellous*. Avoid them by using more exact adjectives, if you wish to describe anything in writing.

Avoid technical jargon by all means, but do not be afraid of finding out what strange and foreign words mean. Look them up in your dictionary, and when you know them, there is no reason why you should not use them, if they are not technical. *Add to your vocabulary.* This is certain to be increased by reading. Read good books, and don't forget to use your dictionary. Read all the Latin and French that you can. Latin and French have been in the past the most potent influences upon English vocabulary. To master these languages is to have the key to a vast store of potential English words in their pure and original forms. Indeed, I will go so far as to say that without some knowledge of Latin you will never write English well. You may write English, but unless you have an excellent memory for words and unless you study the dictionary very thoroughly to assimilate the learned element, you will never

write English with fineness and force. So, if you hate Latin, and like English literature, remember that Latin will help your English enormously.

*Bombast*, or inflated language, is simple and obvious English made pompous by the use of impressive words. It is often heard in speeches and read in the newspapers. This is the sort of thing. "They called into requisition the services of the family physician, but the inflammation extended its devastating career, and at length after painful suffering, sustained with fortitude, his spirit quitted its earthly habitation," which means: They sent for the doctor, but the fever increased, and after a painful illness he died. The historians are somewhat addicted to this rhetorical varnish. Kings always "ascend the throne." If martially inclined, they "fling their armies into a theatre of war"; and there, knowing that great sacrifices are necessary for great ends, the chivalry of Ruritania "dyes with its loyal blood" the soil of a hundred battlefields. At home their "far-seeing chancellors" are "stern and inexorable." But sometimes under a "venal favourite" affairs move rapidly "towards a crisis" in which various factors (all carefully specified) bring about "another phase."

But we must not blame the historians, the tendency is universal where English is spoken and written. The reason is that as common English words are so plain and monosyllabic, we try to obtain sonority and dignity by the use of borrowed polysyllabic words. It is a good thing to write sonorous and dignified English, but we must be careful not to make our sentences laughable by turning simple thoughts into language which is too grand for the thought. Technical terms are necessary sometimes, but it is questionable whether historical and scientific descriptions



might not gain in clearness by our using technical terms as sparingly as possible.

And now, coming back to our definition of good writing as "the best words in the best order," let us think of the best order. Very much depends on the order of words and phrases. Take this sentence, for instance. "He spends his money like a Scotchman in Jerusalem." If you alter the order, and make it "Like a Scotchman, he spends his money in Jerusalem," or "In Jerusalem, he spends his money like a Scotchman," you alter the emphasis, and you alter the meaning. You have to watch the order of your words in the sentence to see that the emphasis is right.

Special attention has to be given to the beginning and the end of sentences and paragraphs. The beginning and the end are emphatic positions. The beginning is the first point of contact, and contains the first hint of what is coming. The reader's interest is largely governed by the opening words. The end inevitably leaves the reader with a final impression, and the strength and the quality of this final impression depends very largely on the force and arrangement of the last few words in the sentence. If you want emphasis, you will often find it an advantage to place your emphatic word or phrase at the beginning or the end. And the end is the more emphatic position.

This applies also to the position of the principal clause in a sentence. In a direct sentence the principal statement is made first, as for instance in the following sentence: "Marlborough decided to attack Namur as soon as the winter was over, although his battalions were depleted by sickness." In a suspended sentence, or, as it is often called, a periodic sentence, the principal statement is kept back until the end, and thus all unconsciously the reader's

curiosity is held in suspense. For example, written as a periodic sentence, our example would become: "As soon as the winter was over, although his battalions were depleted by sickness, Marlborough decided to attack Namur." And either of these is more emphatic than the arrangement with the principal statement in the middle of the sentence. "Although his battalions were depleted by sickness, Marlborough decided to attack Namur as soon as the winter was over." On the other hand, it is not advisable to suspend every sentence. Indeed, in English, such suspensions are not always possible. Comparative and consecutive clauses have to follow the principal statement. But even where suspension is possible, the continual succession of periodic sentences is mechanical and monotonous. Effective they are when used occasionally, when used continually they appear pompous and artificial.

Another kind of suspension—a device, by the way, that was used a good deal by Robert Louis Stevenson—is the suspension of a statement by the insertion of a phrase or a clause. Take this sentence, for instance: "He said, that is not true." It may be expressed a little more forcibly by: "That is not true, he said." But in the sentence, "That, he said, is not true," the emphatic words "that" and "true" are placed in the emphatic positions at the beginning and the end, and the effect is still more forceful. This construction, which we might call "suspension of the statement," may be easily used, but it necessitates additional words, and from its very nature it is not always precise. For instance, "He cherished noble ambitions to the end" is a dignified and precise statement. "He cherished to the end, in spite of all that he had suffered, noble ambitions," is more sonorous, but considerably longer than the precise

statement. As an occasional ornament, the suspension of the statement is graceful, but it is easily overworked.

Order of another kind is the so-called "balanced sentence." In the balanced sentence, phrase is arranged against phrase, and clause against clause. In the two corresponding portions of such a sentence there is symmetry or balance, as in the well-known quotation, "The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." Macaulay has a good example of it in his account of the invasion of Silesia by Frederic the Great. "The evils produced by his wickedness were felt in lands where the name of Prussia was unknown; and, in order that he might rob a neighbour whom he had promised to defend, black men fought on the coast of Coromandel, and red men scalped each other by the Great Lakes of North America." Dr. Johnson made the balanced sentence so distinguished, and eventually so common, that it became almost a figure of speech. It was so characteristic of his style, that Mr. Guedalla, in *Men of Letters*, was able to make this parody of the proper ending for a biography. "He lived in exalted affluence and died in great pain. 'Thus,' it was said by one of the most eloquent of his contemporaries, 'thus terminated a career as varied as it was eventful, and as strange as it was unique.'" The balanced sentence is worth cultivating as a grace, but because of its very artificiality, it can only be used sparingly.

Since clearness is the first aim of prose writing, you should begin by writing short sentences, and let the long and involved sentences come naturally and gradually with experience. Attempt long sentences by all means, but do not try to force them. The danger of the long sentence is that it easily becomes muddled. It may become ambiguous

and even ungrammatical. The great advantage of the short sentence is its clarity. Too many short sentences, however, make for a plain, unattractive style. Become a master of the short, plain statement first; and when you have mastered this, then, if you like, seek to make your writing more weighty by the use of long and involved sentences.

When you have written your sentence, cross out all the unnecessary words. If I write, for example, "There is absolutely no reason at all for this," I am simply saying in a redundant way "There is no reason for this." The precise statement is more forceful than the roundabout, colloquial sentence. Beware of using needless words and phrases. We may say the same thing twice over, as, for example, when I say, "An old, ancient and antique custom." Or we can say the same thing again, but in a different way, as when I say: "The ball-room was crowded with a great number of guests." We ought to be constantly on our guard against *tautology*, as saying the same thing twice over is called, remembering that in order to be precise we must aim at an exact statement of fact. We need to think clearly in order to write clearly.

Finally, learn to punctuate, and to divide your writing into paragraphs and sections. Punctuation is one of the means which are used in order to obtain clearness. You will never be a good writer, and your writing will never be free from ambiguity, unless you learn to punctuate. Unpunctuated writing—such as examiners often get in examination scripts—is difficult to understand; and punctuation is really an act of politeness by the writer for the benefit of the reader. Attend first to the proper order of the words in the sentence, then punctuate. The

punctuation of English is difficult, because it is irregular. In some languages, punctuation is governed by grammatical rules. The sentences and clauses are divided by commas. But in English, punctuation is not so much grammatical, dividing the clauses, as it is rhetorical, dividing the pauses. An old-established rule is that a *comma* denotes a slight pause, a *semi-colon* a longer pause, and a *full stop* the end of the sentence. Speaking generally, any pause in a sentence is denoted by a comma, and if further subdivision is wanted, a semicolon is used. The colon is hardly used at all, except to denote balanced structure, and to introduce dialogue and quotations. English writers use the comma very freely. It is used, for instance, ungrammatically between adjectives, as in the sentence, "He was a stern, morose character"; but if there are three adjectives, as a rule no comma is put between the second and third, as in "He was a stern, morose and inexorable man." Another rule that is often forgotten is that direct questions are indicated by a question-mark, but indirect questions are not. There is no question mark in "He asked him what he thought." I do not think English punctuation has been reduced to a set of rules. Authors show a considerable amount of caprice in their punctuation. The best way to learn to punctuate is to watch your reading, and see how it is done. Note the habits of the great writers, and learn punctuation from them. And remember, *bad punctuation leads to obscurity, but good punctuation makes for clarity.*

English is a strong and fine language with a magnificent literature. It will remain a fine language only so long as English-speaking people will take the trouble to write it well. We owe it to our great literary tradition to write our English as clearly, and as gracefully, and as finely, as lies

within our powers. It is just as necessary to write a good letter as to speak well. Clear thinking, clear speaking and clear writing are a necessity in this age of science. Put fresh heart into your writing, and resolve that our country shall become noted for its clear-thinkers and its great writers.

## VII

### *WHAT LITERATURE IS*

THERE are many different kinds of writing. I can write on a wall: "Cheese is a silly ass." I can make a memorandum on a sheet of paper: "Miss Morton, your mother telephoned for you. Will call at 2 p.m." I can make a time-table, either for a school or for a train-service. One man can write an article for a newspaper, or a book about economics. Others can write a text-book on mathematics, or a very learned article on some minute reaction in chemistry, or some abstruse theory of geology or astronomy. Others can write an advertisement for soap, or a lyrical poem. Others can write an account of a series of events that happened long ago, or an imaginary story of contemporary life. There are very many different kinds of writing, and many kinds of authors. Then what is literature?

It means every kind of writing in a country during a certain period, and the word means literally the putting together of letters and its result. But because there are so many kinds of writing, the meaning of literature is usually restricted to mean writings of the highest class; namely, books which are distinguished for their beauty of imagination and feeling, and recognized by their influence upon the mind; another name for which used to be "poetry."

Poetry, the hand that wrings,  
Bruised albeit at the strings,  
Music from the soul of things.

Writing is really a way of saying something. Writing utters or communicates something that is in the mind. Usually it communicates some kind of information, as when I write a memorandum on a wall or on a sheet of paper, or make a time-table or a text-book. Unfortunately writing may communicate misleading information, such as do some advertisements and political pamphlets. But this is bad literature, because it misleads. The highest merit of good information is that it corresponds to fact. Facts and correct deductions are essential, both in the scientist and in the historian.

On the other hand, there are kinds of writing which, whilst they communicate something, do not communicate what we recognize as information. A story, for instance, whilst the characters and the incidents in it may be possible, or even probable, is sheer fiction—a tissue of pretence, as far as the historical facts are concerned, from beginning to end. A poem about a skylark does not set out to tell us about the size and colour of the bird, or where it builds its nest, and how many eggs it lays, though it may make use of these facts to communicate a mood or an emotion. Poetry has a truth of its own, which is not quite the same kind of truth as correspondence to fact. And the truth of poetry is that it is true to the impulse in the poet's mind, and true to the instincts and hopes, the feelings and imaginings of our human nature. Poetry communicates the language of the heart.

Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud,  
We in ourselves rejoice!  
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,  
All melodies, the echoes of that voice,  
All colours, a suffusion from that light.



Perhaps we can see better what literature is, if we take a poor example of one of its simplest forms, namely a letter. Letters, as a rule, are made of the stuff which poetry is made of, namely, story and feeling. Here is a boy's letter to his grandmother:—

"Dear Granny,

I hope you are very well. Thank you very much for sending me *The Hill*, by H. A. Vachell. It was very kind of you to send me such a nice book. It is about a boy at Harrow, one of the great public schools. He is very sorry when his chum, Harry Desmond, is going to London to win a bet, because he is certain he will be caught. So he goes instead and gets caught by the housemaster and is nearly expelled, only Desmond owns up and saves him. Then Desmond gets killed in the war. It is sad at the end, but I like it very much."

That kind of writing, we might note, is called "description." It writes down from observation the marks or characteristics of the subject described, in this case a book as seen by a juvenile critic.

"We went to B—— yesterday. It is about 78 miles away. We motored there in about two hours and a half. The country is not very pretty, but B—— is a fine city, and there is a big lake there and some statues. We had tea in the gardens and then came home in the evening. On the way we had a puncture, and we thought we should not be home by six thirty, but we did. In the evening we went to Luna Park, and went on the Scenic Railway. Then we went in Noah's Ark. There are lots of dark passages and and there is a skeleton which lights up."

That kind of writing is called "narrative" because it tells a story or narrates a sequence of events. There is a lapse of grammar in it. I wonder if you noticed it?

## WHAT LITERATUR

"I asked mother for some of the ph

She said, 'What do you want them for?

So I told her 'I want them to send to Granny.

'Oh,' she said, 'if it is for her, you can have .  
they are developed.'

So I hope to send you some soon, and meanwhil  
sending you some that I took with my Brownie."

This is another kind of writing called "dialogue",  
which conversation is recorded. It forms the literary part  
of plays written for the stage, and there is usually a good  
deal of it in novels.

"What do you think of them? Ron says they are a  
mouldy lot. Mother thinks some of them are over-exposed.  
I think they are not half bad. After all, as Dad says, you  
can't expect a reflex camera for the price of a Brownie, can  
you? I like them because it was such a jolly day, and even  
if the photographs are not really A1, they will always make  
me remember a glorious day whenever I look at them."

This is yet another kind of writing called "discussion."  
It examines a question by stating the arguments on each  
side, and usually arrives at some conclusion, either by  
reasoning or by instinct.

Now that is just a schoolboy's letter, the communication  
of thoughts which he thinks worth recording to his grand-  
mama. And we might note that he only thinks certain  
selected thoughts worth communicating. He doesn't  
communicate some thoughts that are in his mind: "I hate  
writing letters . . . what shall I say next? . . . O my, isn't  
it hot? . . . what are we going to do this afternoon? . . .  
if I see that goofy kid Michael in our back lane again, I'll  
punch his head . . . that black dog of Warren's is a great

dogs better than cats," though thoughts coming into his head. In other words, some of greater literary value than others. Some don't mean very much, not even to ourselves. The thoughts are those that have an interest and a value for people, as well as for us; such as thoughts which inform people about something, or thoughts about events which in various ways have altered our lives; or thoughts which will please because they imagine a wonderful story, or express some sentiment which we feel is right. Only certain thoughts and feelings are literary. Worthless thoughts and ignoble feelings are better dead.

If we examine this letter, we shall see that it is about something. It is about a book, a visit to a town, and some photographs. The subject of the letter is thanks for a book, and an account of a day's holiday. If you examine a poem or a story, you will see that it is about something too. And the first question that one asks when one reads anything, is, what is it about? In other words, what is its subject? When we have found out what it is about, we have found out what its subject is; though it is quite likely that when we read it for the first time, we shall not see all that the writer saw in it.

We can say further about our letter, that its subjects are communicated in a familiar, conversational style, without any conscious attempt at literary grace or form. But this is not the only possible treatment of these subjects. They could be written about in various ways; and different people would treat the same subject in different ways.

Supposing the subject were "A Visit to Hollywood", one person might write a humorous poem, another an essay or

sketch, another a story containing a good deal of fiction as well as fact. To one, Hollywood might stand for the romance of gold, and bushrangers; another, more commercially minded, might produce an advertisement for Hollywood as a resort of film-stars. And—if all were compelled to treat the subject in the same way; if, let us suppose, the writing had to be a description of Hollywood, it is certain that all the descriptions would be different. Each writer would be interested in different aspects of Hollywood. Each writer would observe different things. A few would be more vivid and interesting than the rest. Some would tell us a lot of facts. Others would treat the subject with humour and fancy.

And this brings me to my point: the *art* of literature lies in the treatment of a subject, not in the subject itself. A sensitive writer can make an uninteresting subject attractive. An unintelligent writer can make a fine subject dull. The story of the boyhood and youth of a poor child who is pushed out of the home by a cruel stepfather might be very miserable and uninspiring. Dickens invested it with imagination and humour, and made of it *David Copperfield*. The song of a nightingale may be either a nuisance, or something rather wonderful; it depends on our mood. Keats turned his feelings and thoughts about the nightingale's song into his *Ode to a Nightingale*.

All the excellence of literature depends on the mind of the writer, on his intelligence, his imaginative power, his truth and beauty of feeling, and his skill in the sound and meaning of words. Good writing somehow makes a subject interesting; and good writing is simply the treatment of a subject in a fine and forceful way. Now how does good

writing make a subject interesting? It will usually be found, I think, that the good writer has flooded the subject with his imagination, and transformed it into something personal and wonderful. He has made it interesting secondly, by associating it with feelings that are worth communicating because they are beautiful and noble. And thirdly, he has made it interesting by arranging the treatment of the subject in a flow of words and sentences and chapters which leaves out nothing which ought to be said, and says nothing which ought to be left out, and which strikes one, after reading it, as beginning and ending at just the right points.

A good treatment of a subject is imaginative, that is to say it is observant and fanciful with an observation and fancy that quicken our imagination, and make us see it more vividly, and think it more wonderful than our own mind naturally would. A good treatment of a subject is emotional. It rouses our feelings so that we not only see it in our mind's eye, but feel it too. And these imaginative feelings are genuine human feelings that make us love the world and our fellow-men and their Creator more; and by rousing sympathy and love they make us better men. A good treatment of a subject is fine and fluent in its use of language, and is beautiful in its arrangement or form. Great literature is usually about actions and events, and about the characters and the feelings of the people who take part in them; and its greatness lies in the way that the writer communicates what is in his mind.

And now, to illustrate what I have said, I want you to look up Milton's poem, *Lycidas*. You know the poem:

Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more  
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy 'never sere,  
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,  
And with forced fingers rude  
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.  
Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear  
Compels me to disturb your season due:  
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,  
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:

because it is a splendid example of my point, namely, that the art of literature lies in the treatment of the subject.

"Lycidas," the Rev. Edward King, Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge—an acquaintance of Milton—had been shipwrecked and drowned in the Irish Sea. Milton wrote this poem as an elegy upon his death, and it is one of the greatest poems in the English language. In other words, in any collection of the hundred best poems, this would appear. And note, moreover, that I do not say eloquent, I say great. Now why is it great? Not because of the subject. The drowning of the Rev. Edward King means nothing to us. The poem is great because the style of the poem is great.

It is great firstly because of the imagination with which Milton has invested the subject. He might have given an imaginative description of the shipwreck. He might have told what an excellent young man Lycidas was. He does nothing of the sort. He pretends that he and Lycidas were Sicilian shepherds, and that he has come to the woods to gather a funeral wreath for his dead friend. And so, calling the Muses to lament for Lycidas, he pictures their college life at Cambridge as a partnership in the tending of sheep.

Together both, ere the high lawns appear'd  
 Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,  
 We drove a-field, and both together heard  
 What time the gray fly winds her sultry horn,  
 Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night,  
 Oft till the star, that rose at evening bright,  
 Toward heaven's descent had sloped his westerling wheel.  
 Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute,  
 Temper'd to th' oaten flute;  
 Rough Satyrs danced, and Fauns with cloven heel  
 From the glad sound would not be absent long;  
 And old Damoetas loved to hear our song.

He says that the death of Lycidas is a blight, like frost  
 on flowers:

As killing as the canker to the rose,  
 Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze.

Mark this imagination, because it pervades the whole poem and transforms it. The Rev. Edward King is no longer a clergyman drowned in the Irish Channel; he is Lycidas, for whom the River Cam and St. Peter mourn, for whom the Sicilian Muse strews flowers of every kind—

the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,  
 The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,  
 The white pink, and pansy freak'd with jet,  
 The glowing violet,

and for whom the angels sing—

There entertain him all the saints above  
 In solemn troops, and sweet societies  
 That sing, and singing in their glory move,  
 And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.

The poem is great, too, because, in his treatment of the death of Lycidas, Milton links the event to feelings that are beautiful and noble. If life be short and uncertain, why be earnest and strenuous? he asks; for that is the meaning of the passage:

Alas! what boots it with uncessant care  
To tend the homely, slighted, shepherd's trade,  
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?  
Were it not better done, as others use,  
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,  
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?

And Milton answers: because reputation and success in this world do not matter. Heaven gives us credit for our intentions, and we shall be judged not only for what we did, but for what we strove for and hoped to be. Sadness for the loss of an earnest young friend is extended to sadness for the lack in the world of such earnestness as was his. We feel with Milton the value of ideals and of purpose in life. But, says Milton, Lycidas is not dead,

Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor.

He is alive. He is in heaven,

And hears the unexpressive nuptial song  
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.

And lastly, the poem is great because of Milton's command of eloquent language and fine imagery, and because he has treated the subject in a way that is so perfect that it is inimitable. The poem is full of such splendour, so many beautiful phrases and rich, resounding lines, that quotation is unnecessary. Every reader can find



more verbal felicities than I have space or time to quote. If you know this poem, not as a dull and difficult classic to memorize and understand, but as a poem to love, you have already a very fair notion of what literature is, namely, story or feeling treated with imagination, truth and skill; and you carry with you a memory of language at its best. Every word is chosen, either for its meaning or its associations, or its beauty of sound—And yet the poem is only saying in a very splendid way "Lycidas was a splendid fellow." The subject of the poem is first cousin to "Cheese is a silly ass." And the only difference between them is that Milton could write, he knew how to sing and build the lofty rhyme, and the other fellow couldn't. That is what literature is—saying things that are worth saying in a splendid way.

## VIII

### *WHAT IS A STORY?*

**W**HEN the first hunter came back to the primeval cave and told his fur-clad family how he had spent his day, there was the beginning of one kind of story; and if he told how he chased the fallow deer with his hounds and killed it, and was just about to carry it home when a hunter from another tribe fell upon him, killed one of his hounds and fought with him, and how he wounded him and drove him off, and brought the deer home, no worse for his adventure, there was a story already made. When an old man of the tribe, one who had pondered long about the world and its meaning, assumed that the sun and the moon and the earth and the winds and the rivers were alive, and told stories about them; how the sun married the earth, and the earth brought forth all kinds of living creatures; how the god of the river had it in his power to grant good fishing to men; how the winds had different names, and some were kindly to men and others unfriendly, there was another kind of story—a story which, like science, endeavoured to explain the nature of things so that men could understand them. Stories are amongst the oldest things in the world.

And from that day to this stories have been made. Some are based on fact. Others are pure fiction; that is, they are pretence or supposition. They seem true, but they are all imagination. Poets and novelists imagine people and make up stories about them, which often seem so much like truth that, even if they have not actually happened,

there is no reason why they should not. Such stories to the reader seem real, and the method of making stories seem real is known as "realism." Other stories are more improbable. Some might have happened, though their incidents are uncommon, such as historical stories about war and love and treachery in the olden times. Others, quite frankly, could never happen. Their incidents are impossible. But if they could happen, then the supposition is probable, as for instance the story of the invasion of the earth by inhabitants of the planet Mars, or the account of a voyage to the moon, or a fairy story. Stories such as these, which are more remote from ordinary life than realistic stories, are called "romances." And incidents and characters that are more wonderful and more surprising than those of real life, such as a duel, or an elopement, or a wooden-legged pirate, or a prince in disguise, are called "romantic."

If you ask me why poets make up stories, I cannot tell. I can only say that it seems to be a gift with some people, who find a pleasure in giving delight to other people by making stories. But it is a good gift when rightly used, because stories not only give a good deal of pleasure, but, without our being aware of it, they teach us indirectly notions of behaviour, and from them we learn a great deal about the world around us, and about the thoughts and feelings of men and women. And since the making of stories is a gift which is so pleasing and so instructive, we should honour such writers, because they have a wonderful power which most people lack.

Now we have all read stories; we all know a story when we read one. Let us consider for a few moments what a story is, and what the components are that go to make one.

First of all, there must be men and women. A story is about human beings. It is possible to write stories about dogs and horses, because dogs and horses are rather like human beings in some respects. But you couldn't write a very interesting story about a tree, or a beetle or a fish; and if you did succeed in making it interesting, it would most likely be because you associated it somehow or other with human beings. Stories are about people—men and women, boys and girls. And they are about mankind, because human beings have a mind, and can think, and say what they think; and they have a character, and their character leads them to act in certain ways.

A story is about people, who say things and do things. In other words, in a story there are characters and their conversations, and there are incidents narrated and described. Which comes first into the author's mind, the characters, or the incidents? I cannot say. Sometimes story-tellers think of the characters first, and let the story follow from what they are; sometimes they think of the happenings first, and imagine characters to fit the incidents. But the characters and the incidents must fit. It would not do, for instance, to tell us that a cruel step-mother was consistently kind to her step-daughter; we should not believe that she was cruel: or that a brave soldier habitually ran away because he did not like war; we should not believe that he was brave.

Stories are about people who say things and do things, because they think and feel, and because they are the sort of person that they are. And part of the delight of reading stories is to find out not only what people do, but why they do the things they do; in other words, what sort of people are they? What are they like? What is their character?

We find this out from what they do and what they say; and from what other characters, and the author himself, say about them. And by learning to observe the ways of characters in stories, we learn something of the ways of human nature. We find that there are deep-rooted instincts in man which make him love his home and nation, feelings which make him fight for them if the need arises. We find that some people are of strong will-power, able to struggle, to search, to endure, and to battle onwards. We find that others are weak, and fail when put to the test; and others are untrustworthy, who scheme to win honour or money, and will betray and cheat and steal to gain their ends. We find that some people are kind and pitiful, and delight in helping the weak, but that others are selfish and grasping, and think only of themselves. There is really nothing so interesting as the principles underlying the behaviour of mankind. And stories exist simply to show the difference between one type of human nature and others.

Now what is a story? Because we have not yet come to the point. A pure description, such as a description of a character or a description of a scene, is not necessarily a story. Even a narrative, such as an account of a person lying ill in bed, or a shipwreck, or a race, is not necessarily a story. A story needs some sort of pattern in it, and the simplest kind of pattern is like a knot—the movement which represents the narrative is linked with some complication which alters the course of events and resolves it in some different way—the doctor comes and the patient recovers; the life boats are launched but the captain refuses to leave his ship; the favourite is beaten by an outsider. A short story dealing with a single incident may have just

one complication and its resolution. A long novel may have several complications, but as a rule there will be a series of complications which are all settled, one way or another, during the course of the story. And if you ask me why there are complications, I answer, it is to give interest to the story. Every complication turns the story into a problem. What will happen now? Will he do this or that? Will he succeed? Or will he fail? Our expectation is roused, and we cannot rest until we have seen what the outcome will be. The planning of a story to make it have interest is known as "plot," and plot simply means plan or scheme.

I have already said that the art of literature lies in the treatment of the subject. This applies to story-telling, too. There are not really many kinds of story. The same stories of fighting, and searching, and love, and cheating and betrayal, are told over and over again. What matters is how the story is told. There are the characters. They may be kings; they may be peasants. There is the imaginary world in which they live, town or country, past or present—the "setting" of the story, as it is sometimes called. Here also there is a great opportunity for imagination. In a good story, the imaginary surroundings of the characters seem vivid. You can reconstruct the scene in your imagination. There is the interest of suspense. You are loath to put down a good story until your hopes and fears are at rest. All the art of story-telling lies in the way the story is told. A well-told story appeals to the imagination; it is beautiful, it quickens emotions, it is interesting, it rouses admiration, it is well written and well constructed.

And now I want to illustrate what I have said from Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, ch. XXX.

## DISAPPEARANCE OF THE SASSAGE-MAKER

"Wery nice pork-shop that 'ere, Sir."

"Yes, it seems so," said Mr. Pickwick.

"Celebrated Sassage factory," said Sam.

"Is it?" said Mr. Pickwick.

"Is it!" reiterated Sam, with some indignation; "I should rayther think it was. Why, Sir, bless your innocent eyebrows, that's vere the mysterious disappearance of a respectable tradesman took place four years ago."

"You don't mean to say he was burked, Sam?" said Mr. Pickwick, looking hastily round.

"No, I don't indeed, Sir," replied Mr. Weller, "I vish I did; far worse than that. He was the master o' that 'ere shop, Sir, and the inwenter o' the patent-never-leavin'-off sassage steam-ingine, as ud swaller up a pavin' stone if you put it too near, and grind it into sessages as easy as if it was a tender young babby. Wery proud o' that machine he was, as it was nat'ral he should be, and he'd stand down in the celler a-lookin' at it ven it vas in full play, till he got quite melancholy with joy. A werry happy man he'd ha' been, Sir, in the procession o' that 'ere ingine and two more lovely hinfants besides, if it hadn't been for his wife, who was a most ow-dacious wixin. She was always a-follerin' him about, and dinnin' in his ears, 'till at last he couldn't stand it no longer. 'I'll tell you what it is, my dear,' he says one day; 'if you persewere in this here sort of amusement,' he says, 'I'm blessed if I don't go away to 'Merriker; and that's all about it.' 'You're a idle willin,' says she, 'and I wish the 'Merrikins joy of their bargain.' Arter vich she keeps on abusin' of him for half an hour, and then runs into the little parlour behind the shop, sets to a-screamin', says he'll be the death on her, and falls in a fit, which lasts for three good hours—one o' them fits vich is all screamin' and kickin'. Well, next mornin', the husband was missin'. He hadn't taken nothin' from the till,—hadn't even put on his great-coat—so it was quite clear he warn't gone to 'Merriker. Didn't come back next day; didn't come back next week; Missis had bills printed, sayin' that, if he'd come back, he should be forgiven everythin' (which

was very liberal, seein' that he hadn't done nothin' at all); all the canals was dragged, and for two months arterwards, venever a body turned up, it was carried, as a reg'lar thing, straight off to the sassage-shop. Hows'ever, none of 'em answered; so they gave out that he'd run away, and she kep on the bis'ness. One Saturday night, a little thin old gen'l'm'n comes into the shop in a great passion and says, 'Are you the missis o' this here shop?' 'Yes I am,' says she. 'Well, Ma'am,' says he, 'then I've just looked in to say that me and my family ain't a-goin' to be choaked for nothin'; and more than that, Ma'am,' he says, 'you'll allow me to observe that as you don't use the primest parts of the meat in the manafacter o' sassages, I think you'd find beef come nearly as cheap as buttons.' 'As buttons, sir!' says she. 'Buttons, Ma'am,' says the little old gentleman, unfolding a bit of paper, and shewin' twenty or thirty halves o' buttons. 'Nice seasonin' for sassages, is trousers' buttons, Ma'am.' 'They're my husband's buttons!' says the widder, beginnin' to faint. 'What!' screams the little old gen'l'm'n, turnin' wery pale. 'I see it all,' says the widder; 'in a fit of temporary insanity he rashly converted his-self into sassages!' "And so he had, Sir," said Mr. Weller, looking steadily into Mr. Pickwick's horror-stricken countenance, "or else he'd been draw'd into the ingine; but however that might ha' been, the little old gen'l'm'n, who had been remarkably partial to sassages all his life, rushed out o' the shop in a wild state, and was never heerd on arterwards!"

Now that is only a short anecdote, but it has a plot. The complication is that the inventor of the sausage-machine is lost. He hasn't gone to America, for he has left his overcoat behind. The resolution is that the thin old gentleman produces the buttons. Suspense is over. The complication is resolved. There is an air of humorous fantasy about the story. The inventor has been "draw'd into" his own engine. All gruesomeness and all natural human emotion are suppressed. "The little old gen'l'm'n,



who had been remarkably partial to sassages all his life, rushed out o' the shop in a wild state, and was never heerd on arterwards."

Note the art with which (I nearly said vith vich) the story is told. Told as a bare narrative, it would be uninteresting. In fact it would run something like this. A sausage-maker quarrelled with his wife. He disappeared. A customer produced buttons which proved that he had been made into sausages by his own machine. Dickens added interest to the story. The story is told as by Sam Weller in his own peculiar Cockney dialect, and with his love of exaggeration and romantic bamboozlement. The sausage-maker had some justification for wanting to disappear. His wife was an "owdacious wixin". "She was always a-follerin' him about, and dinnin' in his ears, 'till at last he couldn't stand it no longer." He might have gone to America. He chose to disappear into his own patent sausage-machine. The suspense is artfully indicated. "The canals was dragged, and for two months arterwards, venever a body turned up, it was carried, as a reg'lar thing, straight off to the sassage-shop." The disappearance is insoluble at the point when it is resolved by the entrance of the little, thin old gentleman.

It is a very slight story, but it will serve to illustrate my point, namely, that every story has certain elements or ingredients. Let us write them down.

(1) *Men and women*, or, as they are often called "characters". In this story there are only three characters.

(2) *Events and incidents*, so arranged as to follow each other in order of time, and having a plot: that is to say, so arranged that there is a complication or a tangle of affairs, followed by a resolution or an unravelling of the tangle. In this story the plot is very simple. The sausage-maker

disappears. That is the complication. The buttons are found. That is the resolution.

(3) *A place and time in which it happens*, or as it is often called, the "scene" or "setting." In this story the scene is Dickens's London, and the time, 1824.

And now a word or two about story-telling. The first thing to do is to find your story. The second is to tell it. I can't speak about the first, because the story, if you have one, belongs to you, and you only know what it is. So I will confine my remarks to the second. And here again I don't think I dare lay down any definite rules as to the best way of telling a story, because the best way for you is the one which suits your particular gift. I mean this. If you are fond of adventure, you will introduce lots of it. If you are interested in character, you will aim at scenes which will gradually reveal the behaviour of the persons you are trying to portray. If you like to hear your characters talk, you can tell a good deal of the story in the form of dialogue—and most readers like plenty of conversation.

Before you begin, you have to decide who is going to tell the story. Is the hero going to tell it? Or are you going to tell it yourself? I mean, is it to be, "One day I was travelling in the woods in California," or is it to be, "One day there was a traveller in the woods in California." This makes a good deal of difference. If the hero tells the story, the story gains in vividness and perhaps in interest, but the incidents have to be confined to those in which the hero takes a part, and the other characters are all seen through the hero's eyes. This may be useful in some stories—in *Treasure Island*, for instance, or *Lorna Doone*, but it would not suit stories with several main characters about whom the author is supposed to know everything—stories such as *Ivanhoe*, *The Talisman*, or *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Except in

a very personal story of adventure, it is best to tell it as if the author saw it all happen, and knew everything about the characters.

Then you have to decide where to begin. You want a point not too far from the end of the story, so that the events follow quickly to the end. You want a scene that will introduce your hero or heroine, or one of your principal characters, and will not only tell us a good deal about them and give us a clue to their character, but will tell us enough about their circumstances, and about the past if necessary, to put us in possession of the beginning of the story until the first thing happens.

Then you want a series of incidents or scenes, with increasing complications and increasing speed, until at the point of greatest suspense there is a turning point, the tangle is smoothed out, and you sail into calm waters at the end. And the end should be swift, so swift perhaps that it is hinted rather than described; and it should be satisfactory, both to you, and to your reader. The art of narrative in a story is the same as in any attempt to present facts in history or biography, and it depends on three things—(1) a clear conception of the characters, their appearance, personality and behaviour; (2) the vivid representation in narrative, description and dialogue, of certain selected scenes—incidents that are selected for their part in the story, and for the light which they shed upon character; and (3) lastly, sufficient observation, imagination and wit to reproduce conversation and speeches.

It is a difficult thing to write a good story, and, as in all the affairs of life, some people can do it much better than others: but it is a great art, and it exercises a great influence on mankind. Which would you rather be, a Dickens or a Napoleon?

## IX

### FEELINGS

**H**AS it ever struck you that when people are very full of feeling, and restrain their emotion, their language takes on quite a new aspect. It becomes pregnant with meaning, that is, it teems with ideas which set the imagination working. And, moreover, it tends to become rhythmical.

In a time of religious persecution the Bishop of Worcester and the Bishop of London were being burned at the stake by those who believed them to be wrong. "Play the man, Master Ridley," said Latimer, "we shall this day light such a candle in England as I believe shall never be put out." In a time of the breaking of nations, Nelson destroyed the French fleet off Cape Trafalgar. Before the battle, apprehensive of what failure might mean, he signalled to his fleet. "England expects every man to do his duty," and in that battle he died. His last words were, "I'm satisfied. Thank God I have done my duty." The news arrived in London in time for the Lord Mayor's banquet. Pitt spoke, and in a memorable speech commented on the victory in these words:—"England has saved herself by her courage; she will save Europe by her example."

Or, another example. During the American Civil War, Lincoln became President for the second time. He had liberated the slaves, but the war was not yet won, though thousands had laid down their lives. Dissension was raising its voice, yet he felt impelled to continue the war. Listen to his words. "Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray,

that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' With malice towards none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations."

Words like these have a kind of magic in them. They speak the language of the spirit rather than the language of reason. They touch our heart; something kindles it and warms it, and we too feel.

I think that a good deal of great literature has this quality of feeling. Some great occasion stirs the writer's feelings. It may be real, and arise out of experience like Wordsworth's *Elegiac Stanzas on Peele Castle*,

Not for a moment could I now behold,  
A smiling sea, and be what I have been:  
The feeling of my loss will ne'er be old;  
This, which I know, I speak with mind serene.

or like Milton's *Sonnet on the Massacre in Piedmont*,

Avenge O Lord Thy slaughter'd saints, whose bones  
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold.

Or it may arise from imagination, like the end of  
*Samson Agonistes*,

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail  
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,  
Dispraise or blame, nothing but well and fair,  
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

Or like the last words of King Lear,

And my poor fool is hanged! No, no, no life!  
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,  
And thou no life at all? Thou'lt come no more,  
Never, never, never, never, never!  
Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir.

Whether feeling is direct or imaginative does not matter in poetry, provided that the feeling rings true, and speaks to the heart. An imaginary feeling acts on us in the same way as a real one. We may pity King Lear as deeply as we pity an old beggar in real life. We may feel Wordsworth's delight in nature as keenly as Wordsworth felt it. We may feel Browning's interest in imaginary men and women and their ways, as deeply as he meant us to feel it.

Do not mistake me. I have been quoting examples from poetry, but feeling occurs in essays and speeches and sermons, too. If you have read any of the essays of Addison or Lamb or Macaulay, you must have noticed how delight and humour and pathos are recorded in your mind as you read. Do you think that the essayist could produce in you the feeling of pleasure, if he had not first felt it himself? No, the essayist is communicating to you the emotions which he has felt as he thought about his

subject. And similarly in speeches, too, emotion is to be found. A speech as a rule is an argument or a discussion. It makes a point, or it may make several. It states and discusses very rationally up to a certain point, but then the speaker's feelings break through, and he speaks straight to the heart. Listen to Burke in his speech on *Conciliation with America*, one of the most rational and argumentative of speeches:

Slavery they can have anywhere. It is a weed that grows in every soil. They may have it from Spain, they may have it from Prussia. But until you become lost to all feeling of your true interest and your natural dignity, freedom they can have from none but you. This is the commodity of price, of which you have the monopoly. It is the spirit of the English Constitution, which, infused through the mighty mass, pervades, feeds, unites, invigorates, vivifies every part of the empire, even down to the minutest member.

Feeling in literature, then, may be imaginative, or it may be direct. Behind a good deal of personal literature, such as speeches and essays and lyrical poetry, there lies the real feeling of the author. In the great scenes of fiction, in drama and the novel, there is feeling which arises from the friendships and conflicts of imaginary men and women. Indeed feeling, no less than imagination, is one of the factors in great literature. And by feeling I mean the instinctive and elementary emotions of love and hate, joy and grief, and the thousand and one moods and doubts and hesitations that arise from them, and play such a great part in our daily lives. The man who does not feel is not alive. He leads an existence like a vegetable or a reptile.

Feeling, then, like imagination, is one of the great gifts of the poet, and we might define verse as the language of

emotion. Feeling associates itself with rhythm in language. Where feeling predominates, as in lyrical poetry, and sometimes in drama, the language of the poet shapes itself naturally in one of the forms of verse. Emotion may be said to be the source of all great poetry. Lyrical poetry springs from the personal feelings and moods of the poet. Narrative poetry and drama deal very largely with the feelings of imaginary characters, and it is passion which urges the natural eloquence of emotion into rhythmical periods. Rhythm answers to the emotions of the poet. Listen to these verses:—

The mind has a thousand eyes,  
And the heart but one;  
Yet the light of a whole life dies  
When love is done.

Do you see how the trip of the anapaestic feet is broken in the last line for the melancholy cadence? Here is another emotion:

Breathes there the man with soul so dead  
Who never to himself has said,  
"This is my own, my native land!"

Can you not feel patriotism in the stately march of these lines? And can you feel ardour in these?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold,  
Bring me my Arrows of desire,  
Bring me my Spear, O clouds, unfold!  
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

Is there not a harmony of rhythm and feeling? Rhythm answers to emotion. The feeling glows in the poet's mind; the rhythm is in expression; but they are united. These



passages seem magnificent because the rhythm echoes and confirms the spirit behind them.

A poet, then, is a man of feeling. Emotion quickens his eloquence and lends rhythm to his communications. Why do the styles of poets differ so much, if emotion be the force behind poetry? The answer is, I think, that there are different kinds of feeling. Different poets react to different objects. Keats was stirred by beauty, Shelley by freedom, Browning by human nature, and Byron by himself. Shelley wrote a great poem on a skylark: Wordsworth wrote one not so good. Shelley's feelings about the skylark were more poetical than Wordsworth's. Emotion is associated with the personality of the poet. One poet is aflame with religious feeling, others feel strongly about either kings or mobs, and others again care little for religious discipline or for forms of government, but think much of nature, inanimate or human. Love and joy become associated with different objects. The feelings are there in all poets, but they are directed into different channels. This is a difference of kind, but there is also a difference of quality. There are some poets who have acquired fineness and delicacy of feeling, poets of sensibility we might call them, they have such refinement and tenderness. Chaucer is one, Spenser is another. And in more modern times, Gray, Cowper, Coleridge and Tennyson. Others are stronger and more forceful. They have fire and strength—"bards of passion" Keats called them. They have a fierce sincerity of deep feeling which seems to blaze and scatter a feeling of glory. These are the great poets; and Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Shelley, Blake, and Wordsworth possess this gift.

I can best illustrate my meaning if I give you some specimens. Here are some examples of sensibility:—

Whan that Aprill with his shoures sote  
 The droghte of March hath perced to the rote  
 And bathed every veyne in swich licour  
 Of which vertu engendred is the flour;  
 Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth  
 Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
 The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne  
 Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,  
 And smale fowles maken melodye,  
 That slepen al the night with open eye  
 (So priketh hem nature in hir corages):  
 Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages  
 And palmers for to seken straunge strondes.

That is the beginning of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
 The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,  
 The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,  
 And leaves the world to darkness and to me.  
 Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,  
 And all the air a solemn stillness holds,  
 Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,  
 And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds.

You know that poem, I am sure. It is Gray's *Elegy, Written in a Country Churchyard*.

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,  
 Tears from the depths of some divine despair  
 Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,  
 In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,  
 And thinking of the days that are no more.

That is Tennyson in a song from a play, *The Princess*.

There is observation. There is experience of life. There is truth and beauty of feeling. At first sight this kind of poetry seems the best that we can deserve or desire. But listen to these. Here is passion!

Shakespeare's Hotspur is speaking in *1 Henry IV*, I, iii.

By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap,  
To pluck bright honour from the pale-fac'd moon;  
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,  
Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,  
And pluck up drowned honour by the locks.

Milton's Satan is speaking in *Paradise Lost*, Book 1:

What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost; the unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield:  
And what is else not to be overcome?  
That glory never shall his wrath or might  
Extort from me.

Here are two stanzas from Blake's poem, *The Tyger*:

When the stars threw down their spears,  
And watered heaven with their tears,  
Did He smile his work to see?  
Did He who made the Lamb make thee?  
  
Tiger! Tiger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

And here is Wordsworth, speaking of his passion for nature, in *Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey*:

For I have learned  
To look on nature, not as in the hour  
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes  
The still, sad music of humanity,  
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

The quality is unmistakable, isn't it? It goes straight to the heart. It moves. It fires. It is sincere. If you doubt it, let me give you an example of false passion. For there are poets as there are actors, who, lacking the true Promethean fire, imitate it. Here is one from the eighteenth century,—Falconer's *The Shipwreck*!

It comes! the dire catastrophe draws near,  
Lashed furious on by destiny severe:  
The ship hangs hovering on the verge of death,  
Hell yawns, rocks, rise, and breakers roar beneath!  
O yet confirm my heart, ye powers above!  
This last tremendous shock of fate to prove;  
The tottering frame of reason yet sustain,  
Nor let this total havoc whirl my brain;  
Since I, all trembling in extreme distress,  
Must still the horrible result express.

Here is another from the nineteenth century:

The angels, not half so happy in heaven,  
Went envying her and me—  
Yes! that was the reason (as all men know,  
In this kingdom by the sea)  
That the wind came out of the cloud one night,  
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.

For the moon never beams without bringing me dreams  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side  
Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride,  
In the sepulchre there by the sea,  
In her tomb by the sounding sea.

False fire, isn't it? Torture without pain! Glow without heat! The stuffed pheasant, dull in the feathers, and beginning to show signs of age, and not the living bird of paradise! That is the worst kind of poetry, and there are many bad kinds—the poetry whose feeling is self-deception. Poetic feeling must be genuine.

I have said that feeling is one of the factors of great literature. Now what does feeling do? It does almost everything. It chooses the subject, for no author will write upon a subject in which he does not find a pleasure derived from either love or hate. And it colours the way in which the subject is communicated, or the "style", as it is called. Feeling gives it what eloquence and grace it possesses. It lends it rhythm, if it is communicated in prose; and metre, if in verse. It suggests appropriate words. The style of an author is the product of his experience, his imagination and his feelings. He may have much, or he may have little to say; but depend upon it,

he will not say it well, unless his feelings are sincere and deep and restrained.

Yes, feeling does almost everything. Why does an orator make a great speech? Why does a novelist write a great novel? Why does a poet write a great poem? The answer is, he feels deeply enough to be moved to speak or write greatly. Something in life touches his imagination. It moves and delights his mind with the feelings which it arouses. He thinks about it. His imagination works upon his memory, and he returns to it again and again, because it moves him. That is poetic inspiration—and the rest of the art of literature, the syntax and the arrangement, is simply craftsmanship.

And now to amplify what I have said I want to illustrate from Shakespeare. Think first of the songs in his plays. He had to write them for an audience that wanted a song in the course of a play. They fit the scenes where they are inserted; but they have no direct connection. Another song would do just as well. Then how do they fit? Isn't it that the mood of the song corresponds to some emotion in the scene? I would say that Shakespeare's songs communicate a mood. They lack the passion of the great scenes of the dramas. Think of the songs in *The Winter's Tale*, "When daffodils begin to peer", and "Lawn as white as driven snow". Are they not the perfect expression of delight in spring and in salesmanship? And incidentally, a pedlar like Autolycus who can find joy both in nature and in trade is no ordinary fellow.

Think next of the *Sonnets*. Take number 116, for example, the one beginning:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove.

Isn't there a world of difference? This is not a mood. This is passionate sincerity. Shakespeare had a friend, and to that friendship he will admit no obstacle, not rank, nor wealth, nor anger, nor misunderstanding. If they love each other, nothing shall part them. Unreasonable, you say. Yes, it is. It is passion. But does it not strike a sympathetic chord?

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and 'weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

Love will follow the friend in adversity, and in wrong, even to the condemned cell.

And finally, compare that with the verse of one of his plays, *Macbeth*, for instance. Here the verse is inspired by passion, but it is passion of another sort. It is not direct personal feeling. It is imaginary feeling arising from the reactions of imaginary characters to their circumstances. But it convinces, no less than the passion of the sonnets. Why? Because it is true to human nature. It speaks the language of the heart.

## X

### PROSE AND POETRY

I HAVE said that literature means every kind of communication and that poetry is the communication of feeling. Then what is prose, and what is the distinction between prose and poetry?

I would say that prose is usually the communication of thoughts by means of words in the shape of conversation or discourse. Rational statements, arguments, information, and ordinary human conversation, all demand communication in that straightforward flow of words which we call prose. Prose informs; and hence the highest quality of prose is that it shall be informative. Prose should be clear. Its statements should be exact and precise. Its arguments and its thoughts and its words should be set down in proper order. If it has eloquence and grace, so much the better, but its first duty is to tell us what the author means. Prose informs.

What then is poetry? What is the difference between prose and poetry? Think it over a minute. Poetry, you say, is metrical, or perhaps you add "and it is in rhymed verse". Prose, you would agree, is unmetrical, though not perhaps entirely without rhythm, but it is certainly without rhyme. Prose is natural. Poetry is verse. Well, as a rough differentiation, this may serve to begin with. But you have read *The Book of Job*. What is the Book of Job? It is poetry, or is it prose? It looks like prose, but is it? What are we to call poetry when it is translated into prose? The *Iliad* of Homer, for instance. When the *Iliad* of



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into English prose from the original  
it? Does it cease to be poetry?

questions. It is clear that we need a  
poetry. It is comparatively easy to say

Prose is the communication of thoughts,

tion, by means of words in their proper

ary conversation, or discourse, is prose. And

g, though it may be imaginative, or though it

emotional and therefore elevated in style, follows

ary conversation in being natural and non-metrical.

A translation or a paraphrase of a poem into prose, like  
*The Book of Job* or a prose translation of the *Iliad*, retains  
the poetic imagination and emotion of the original, but  
loses the poetic rhythm and the poetic use of words of the  
original poem. In other words, the subject of the poem  
and the poet's conception still remain poetic, but the  
communication has become prosaic. The poem ceases to  
be verse, but has it ceased to be poetry?

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and  
said:

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?  
Declare, if thou hast understanding?

When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of  
God shouted for joy?

When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick  
darkness a swaddling-band for it,

And said: Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and  
here shall thy proud waves be stayed.

*Job, xxxviii.*

So spake he, and in Achilles he roused desire to weep for  
his father; and he took the old man by the hand, and gently  
put him from him. So the twain bethought them of their  
dead and wept. The one for death-dealing Hector wept

## PROSE AND POETRY

greatly, whilst he grovelled at the feet of Achilles; but Achilles wept for his own father, and sometimes for Patroclus, and the sound of their moaning went up through the house.

*Iliad*, xxiv, 507-12.

That may be prose, but it is not the prose of information. It is not the prose whose merit is to be exact and precise. Indeed I would still call it poetry, because it communicates poetic imagination and poetic feeling. And this brings us back to the question what is poetry.

What is poetry? Well, it is a very difficult question to answer. Perhaps we can best see what poetry is, if we take a short poem and examine it. Let us look at several.

A certain Tom Brown, a good deal of a scapegrace and a bit of a wag, was expelled from Oxford by Dr. Fell, the Dean of Christ Church. He made these lines on the head of his college:

I do not love thee, Dr. Fell,  
The reason why I cannot tell;  
But this I know, and know full well,  
I do not love thee, Dr. Fell.

Not good poetry! you say. No, it is not. But the point is this, the lines represent feelings about Dr. Fell: and they represent feelings, not information, or opinions or arguments.

An anonymous poet of the Elizabethan age fell in love with a beautiful lady. She was far above him in rank. He did not know her, and could never speak to her. But he knew that she was divinely beautiful, and he loved her. He wrote this poem:

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There is a lady sweet and kind,  
Was never face so pleas'd my mind;  
I did but see her passing by,  
And yet I love her till I die.

Her gesture, motion, and her smiles,  
Her wit, her voice, my heart beguiles,  
Beguiles my heart, I know not why,  
And yet I love her till I die.

Quaint and sweet, you say, but not a very deep sort of love! Quite true. It may not have been love, but simply admiration, or wonder. But whatever it was, it was some emotion which so moved and excited the poet that he was impelled to utter it; and somehow it flowed inevitably, in verses with a refrain,

And yet I love her till I die.

Let us take another example, this time a modern one. A poetess named Muriel Stuart went into a florist's shop to buy seeds. She liked the quaint shop, so different from the tidy and luxurious shops which cater for the food and clothes and sports of mankind. She saw the shelves and the boxes full of seeds of all kinds, and in imagination realized the potentiality of all these thousands of seeds. Here were enough seeds to fill huge gardens with flowers of every kind. The notion excited her. In imagination she saw the flowers growing, perfect and at their best, and glorious trees and shrubs all sprung from the dry and dusty seeds. She went from the shop, but the idea would not leave until she wrote it down. This is what she wrote:

THE SEED SHOP

Here in a quiet and dusty room they lie,  
 Faded as crumbled stone or shifting sand,  
 Forlorn as ashes, shrivelled, scentless, dry—  
 Meadows and gardens running through my hand.

In this brown husk a dale of hawthorn dreams,  
 A cedar in this narrow cell is thrust,  
 That will drink deeply of a century's streams;  
 These lilies shall make summer on my dust.

Here in their safe and simple house of death,  
 Sealed in their shells a million roses leap;  
 Here I can blow a garden with my breath,  
 And in my hand a forest lies asleep.

Now, that is a better poem. The words are melodious and well chosen. And it expresses one idea which cannot fail to touch the imagination—the thoughts that all these myriads of dry seeds can live and flower.

Here I can blow a garden with my breath,  
 And in my hand a forest lies asleep.<sup>1</sup>

But in essence it is the same as the other poems which we have considered. It represents feelings. Indeed it might be called "Thoughts in a Seed Shop", for these feelings pass from an attitude of mind into thoughts that can be defined. Yet the main thought of the poem is not information. We do not need to be told that seeds will grow if planted. It is a fact, and the seedsman's business and the seedsman's advertisements depend on that fact. The main thought of the poem is poetry, and it is emotion. What colour, what scent, what beauty lies imprisoned in these small brown seeds! How wonderful that such

1. From *Poems*, by Muriel Stuart (Jonathan Cape).

shrivelled and scentless fragments, seemingly as dead as ashes, should swell and grow and burst into a thousand glorious flowers!

I think if we examined still more poems we should find the same result. Poetry springs from feeling, from emotions of every kind. The poet undergoes some experience; or, some great event in his life, which may seem quite trivial to other people, so moves him, that he is impelled by the feelings within him, which excite him and set his imagination working, to utter his thoughts in words which in this state of mind fall naturally into rhythms. Poetry is the communication of a poetic experience. Why then do poets write in rhyme and metre? They do so because poets have written in rhyme and metre for so long that it has become traditional. The reason why poets took to rhyme is so old that it has been forgotten; but a tradition has grown up, and nowadays poets who break away from tradition and write in unmetrical verse, or free verse as it is called, are regarded as revolutionists and iconoclasts. So many great poems have been written in rhyme and metre that poets, perhaps quite unconsciously, think of their poem in terms of some great poem of long ago, and either use a metre which has an established traditional use, or they modify it, or invent a new one. Verse and rhyme are not essential to poetry, but they are almost essential to personal poetry such as we have just been considering.

But now let us look at another kind of poetry. After the death of a rather chivalrous outlaw named Robin Hood, many stories of his exploits were told amongst the peasantry of his native land, and several anonymous rhymesters made ballads about some of them, so that they

can be sung. What was the inspiration here? Was it the historical events in which Robin had played a part? Not so, for they were not great events. No, it was Robin Hood that moved the balladists to song—the courtesies, the bravery, the jollity of the gallant outlaw. They idealized him, they admired him, they loved him, and that was the poetic experience which the ballads communicated. Take any ballad you like, English or Scottish, and if you examine it you will see that feeling, and not history, caused it to be written.

The same is true of all stories and novels, whether they are told in verse or prose. It is because a writer feels deeply about a story, or about a certain character or an interesting situation, that he turns it over in his mind, develops it in his imagination, and finds a growing delight in it, until at last he can hold it no longer and keep it to himself. He writes it down, following an older tradition if he writes it in verse, and a newer if he tells it in prose. Poetry is feeling, and feeling stimulates both imagination and thought. Poetry is the child of delight, and whether it be written in verse or in prose, it is written to delight the reader. It does this in various ways. It delights by the feelings which it evokes in the reader, by its appeal to the imagination, by the pictures which it suggests, by its rhythms, and above all by its use of words. For words have sounds and ranges of meaning which are a real delight to those who love the art of literature, and appropriate rhythms and beautiful word-pictures are the oldest and the universal adornments of poetry.

Poetry, therefore, which is the communication of an emotional experience that may be real and personal, or unreal and imaginary, may be written either in verse or in

prose. Novels and dramas are poetry though they may be written in prose. *Hamlet* is a poem, though parts of it happen to be written in prose. *David Copperfield* is also a poem, though not a poem of the same kind as Wordsworth's *Prelude*. Verse lends itself to loftier eloquence, and is technically more difficult to write than prose. Verse is excellent for the communication of personal emotion in lyrical and reflective poetry. Prose is admirable for fiction, and most stories and plays are nowadays written in prose.

And now, I think, we realize that a poetic impulse may be derived by a poet from an experience of any kind, from joy and sorrow, observation and reflection, from life and even from reading. And we agree that his interest may be in his own feeling and thoughts, or it may be in the life and characters of other people. He may write lyrical and reflective verse, or he may write novels and plays. If we have arrived at this conclusion, we are in a position to distinguish between poetry and verse. *Poetry* is the communication of a poetic experience either in verse or prose. *Verse* is the communication of a poem in regular rhythmical diction. Verse may discard rhyme, as blank verse does. Verse may accept or reject alliteration, or repetition, or refrain, or any of the traditional bonds of poetic style; but metre, regular recurrent rhythm which can be perceived, that verse must have, or it ceases to be verse.

What is poetry? It is the communication of joy in life, the expression of interest in things around us and in human nature.

The world is so full of a number of things,  
I am sure we should all be as happy as kings,

sang Robert Louis Stevenson. And we should, if we could only feel in our minds the beauty of the world around us. That is, I believe, what David meant in the eighth *Psalms*.

O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.

When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?

For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:

All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;

The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

And that is what Wordsworth, approaching the subject from a different angle, meant when he wrote in the Preface to his *Lyrical Ballads* these words:

"The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure. . . .

"Nor let this necessity of producing immediate pleasure be considered as a degradation of the Poet's art. It is far otherwise. It is an acknowledgment of the beauty of the universe, an acknowledgment the more sincere, because not formal, but indirect. It is a task light and easy to him who looks at the world in the spirit of love: further, it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to



the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves.

"Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science. . . .

"Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge. It is as immortal as the heart of man."

## XI

### *THE NOVEL*

**T**HERE are many different kinds of stories: fairy stories, adventure stories, school tales, historical novels, stories about the Middle Ages, stories about modern life, character studies, mystery stories, detective yarns, stories about life in high society, stories about rustic life, stories of wild and improbable adventure; but in spite of their numbers and their variety there are only two sorts, the probable and the improbable.

There are two sorts: those which try to represent life as it is, and those which imagine something more wonderful than ordinary human life. In the one class are stories about love, and honour, and struggle and conflict, and the thousand and one differences in character between human beings in our own times. In the other are stories about the past and about distant lands, stories about fairies and ghosts, stories about impossible adventures, including stories about impossible criminals and even more impossible detectives, stories about other planets, stories about the future, about the state of the world in days to come; stories about Arcadian shepherds, gypsies, buccaneers, pirates, the French Revolution, and cowboys of the wild and woolly west. The former sort mirror life, and are called novels. The latter turn from ordinary life in search of something more wonderful, and are known as romances.

But whether a story is a novel or a romance it is based on imagination; that is to say, the story is pretence or make-believe. Why then do the writers of such books

pretend? The writers of romances pretend, simply to delight us, to take us on the wings of imagination out of our everyday life into another world where villainy is always vanquished and the fair lady won by the hero, whether the scoundrels are bold, bad knights, or crooks or pirates or revolutionists. *Ivanhoe* is an example of romance, and *Treasure Island* and *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *Westward Ho!* and *Lorna Doone*. The writers of novels pretend, not only to please us with their story and their portrayal of characters, but to make us realize and think about some phase of human nature. When people love, or when people hate, they are apt to behave in an extraordinary manner, and to act at times very unfairly. People who are cowardly, or stern, or snobbish or ambitious, say and do things which affect the lives of others; and stories about such people present problems of conduct which are full of interest to those who like to observe and try to understand human nature. All kinds of problems arise, too, in modern civilization from the fact that, being naturally selfish, people do not always want their social institutions to be as fair and efficient as possible. It is possible to write novels which will make people think about such problems of everyday life as bad schools, bad orphanages, bad prisons, bad marriages, and bad laws. And such novels may serve a very useful purpose in making people think about the morality of their laws and institutions. *Nicholas Nickleby* is a novel, and *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, and *Vanity Fair* and *Under the Greenwood Tree*.

Now what do we look for in a novel? What is it that differentiates a good novel from a bad? I am not quite sure that there is an answer to this question. At any rate

I feel sure that one is on dangerous ground in attempting to formulate rules. A novelist needs two gifts, imagination and a knowledge of human nature. If he has those, he can bore us at times, and we forgive him. If he lacks them, he may write finely and eloquently, and we say "what a splendid style he has!" but we never look at the book again. The fact is, a novel is not like a short poem, or even a play, where the whole work can be grasped at one reading, or one performance. No one reads a long novel at a single sitting. One reads it bit by bit, and the impression which it makes is a patchwork of characters and descriptions and scenes which stamp themselves on our memories. We expect dull moments. We expect variety of scenes and characters. On the other hand, in a short story that can be read in an hour or two, the final impression counts for more than the incidents. Here everything must contribute to the total effect. There is no space for dullness, or unnecessary incidents. In a short novel it is desirable that there should be unity of design. In a long novel it is desirable that there should be parts that linger in the memory.

Shall we think for a moment what the elements of a good novel are? Some of them I have already mentioned. Let me jot them down, and then see if you can add to them.

- (1) *Characters who really seem to live.*
- (2) *Scenes that linger in the memory.*
- (3) *Passion.*
- (4) *Humour.*
- (5) *A purpose.*

Perhaps you would add: a good story, a fine narrative style, life-like dialogue and vigorous descriptions. Well, perhaps you are right, though I am not sure. It seems to me that a good many of the novels which we read from day to day, novels that we borrow from the library, novels that friends lend us, have all these qualities, and yet come short of the excellence of the best. It seems to me, too, that the greatest novels live in our memories by their characters and their scenes.

It seems to me that a really great character can make a novel a classic that will last for, well, as long as people have time and inclination to read fiction. When you read that long and rambling romance called *Don Quixote*, what do you carry away with you? Possibly some of the incidents, the attack on the windmills, the adventure at the inn, the meeting with the travelling actors, and perhaps some of Sancho Panza's jests, such as "Blessings", said Sancho Panza "on the man that invented sleep". But most certainly the knight of the rueful countenance. Isn't the most permanent impression the image of the lean, stern-faced warrior with the wild eyes of a madman, mounted in full armour upon his bony steed Rozinante, ready to do battle for the right against any odds? What do you remember of *Robinson Crusoe*? The footprint in the sand, the attack on the stockade. Yes, but can you forget Robinson in his goat-skin suit with his parrot and man Friday? It is the great characters that make a novel live. That is why Dickens is so great. You think *Martin Chuzzlewit* a dull book; yes, but what about Mr. Pecksniff? What about Mark Tapley? What about the immortal Mrs. Gamp? They may be eccentric, but no one can deny that they live. That is why Jane Austen's *Pride*

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*and Prejudice* is such a great novel. A novel together between two covers such vivid character and Mrs. Bennet, Elizabeth, Mr. Collins, Mr. I Lady Catherine de Bourgh, is almost too rich a fe

And what do we mean when we say that character to live? We know they don't. They never live in existence, save in the imagination of their authors. Is it this? They are conceived so vividly in the author's imagination that we can easily conceive them in real life outside the novel. I could easily imagine a visit of Don Quixote to the pictures. "Seest thou, Sancho, yon shadow on a sheet no larger than the spread of a bed. They are the enchantments of the magician Paramonte of Bosco Sagrada. Once they were creatures like you and me, and like that fairest of peerless beauties, the lady Dulcinea del Toboso. Now they are deprived of body and soul, and are thou seest what. Come, bring me my helmet, for I am minded to enter that land of shadows, and, when I find that magician, to force him to liberate these poor souls." That is the test. Put them in a fresh situation, and see if they react to it. If they do, they live.

Can you imagine Mr. Pecksniff as Chancellor of the Exchequer, or Treasurer, of his government. "Ah, my friends, what is it that makes a nation great? Is it wealth? Is it power? No, my friends, it is virtue. It is that blameless integrity of character in word and deed that makes a man's yea, yea, and his nay, nay. It is that honesty which makes every paper pound-note worth twenty shillings, neither more nor less, because the people know that the government is to be trusted, and that in any necessary retrenchment they will be the first to set an example by reducing their own salaries. It is this that makes the widow

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he orphan shed innocent tears of joy. My  
is not the palliatives of the economists, be they  
ise, that make a nation able and willing to pay  
illings in the pound: it is virtue, it is economy,  
sty, it is thrift."

Mr. Pecksniff, after mopping his forehead and  
delightedly to the repeated outbursts of applause,  
come to devise a scheme for reducing the interest of  
nment loans to two per cent.

Can you imagine Mark Tapley in a financial crisis?  
Can you imagine Mrs. Gamp in a nursing home or private  
hospital? Can you imagine Mr. Collins proposing to Dora  
Spenslow or to Fancy Day? I am sure you can. And it  
is because these characters can live outside the scenes in  
which we have met them, that they live. Judged by this  
test, which are the great novels? Are they those with the  
most wonderful adventures? Are they those which are all  
story, with no personal talk of the author to the reader?  
Are they those which end happily? Are they those which  
leave a single and complete final impression on the mind  
of the reader? Or are they those which contain the great  
characters, characters who are portrayed so distinctly and so  
powerfully that they abide in the memory and seem to live  
after the book is read? I would say for myself that, in a  
novel, I think more highly of the characters than of the  
story, and I would call no novel great, however excellent  
the plot, which did not contain some at least of these  
forceful and vivid characters. When next you read a novel,  
try it by this test. See whether you can imagine some of  
the characters in the real life that you know. If you can,  
the author has one at least of the gifts of a great novelist.

And now, what about the scenes? We cannot subject

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them to the same test. They cannot ch  
of David Copperfield's proposal is eterna  
he love, and she be fair. Nicholas Ni  
protecting Smike, and knocking down Mr. S

"Don't blame me for this public interference.  
brought it upon yourself; not I."

"Sit down, beggar!" screamed Squeers, almost besid  
with rage, and seizing Smike as he spoke.

"Wretch," rejoined Nicholas, fiercely, "touch him at y  
peril! I will not stand by and see it done; my blood is u  
and I have the strength of ten such men as you. Look to  
yourself, for by Heaven, I will not spare you, if you drive  
me on!"

"Stand back," cried Squeers, brandishing his weapon.

"I have a long series of insults to avenge," said Nicholas,  
flushed with passion, "and my indignation is aggravated by  
the dastardly cruelties practised on helpless infancy in this  
foul den. Have a care, for if you do raise the devil within  
me, the consequences shall fall heavily upon your own head."

He had scarcely spoken when Squeers, in a violent outbreak  
of wrath and with a cry like the howl of a wild beast, spat  
upon him, and struck him a blow across the face with his  
instrument of torture, which raised up a bar of livid flesh  
as it was inflicted. Smarting with the agony of the blow,  
and concentrating into that one moment all his feelings of  
rage, scorn, and indignation, Nicholas sprang upon him,  
wrested the weapon from his hand, and, pinning him by the  
throat, beat the ruffian till he roared for mercy."

Tom Pinch still departs by coach to London to seek his  
fortune. "Yoho, past hedges, gates, and trees; past  
cottages and barns, and people going home from work. . .  
Yoho, past streams in which the cattle cool their feet, and  
where the rushes grow; past paddock-fences, farms, and  
rick-yards; past last year's stacks, cut, slice by slice, away,



## USE OF ENGLISH

the waning light, like ruined gables, old  
who, down a pebbly dip, and through the  
dash, and up at a canter to the level road  
! Yoho!"

is still fought in *Vanity Fair*. The pursuit  
No more firing is heard in Brussels. Darkness  
down over field and city. And Amelia is still praying  
George, who, all unknown to her is lying on his face,  
d, with a bullet through his heart. Tom Brown is still  
basted by Flashman, and lasts eighteen rounds against  
Slogger Williams. Mr. Collins still states his reasons for  
marrying, before his feelings run away with him, and  
moreover his designs for coming into Hertfordshire and  
selecting a wife. Lady Catherine is still not to be trifled  
with, and demands to know whether her nephew has made  
an offer of marriage.

Being things of beauty, these scenes, they last for ever.  
Fashions may change in dress and in writing, but a scene  
that lingers in the memory is as immortal as the mind of  
man. They are pure poetry, because they are conceived  
and communicated in emotion. And they live, because the  
emotions strike a sympathetic chord in the human heart.  
When next you read a novel, and have put it down, ask  
yourself whether there are any scenes that linger in the  
memory so vividly that you not only see them, but feel  
them too. If there are, whether that novel is old or new,  
whether it is written by a well known name or by an  
unknown writer, you can recommend it confidently to your  
friends.

And this brings me to my third point—passion. For  
what is this power to portray scenes vividly, but poetic  
feeling? Imagination creates characters, sets them moving,

and brings them to some incident, some great occasion, when the novelist's feelings are moved more than, at the outset, he had imagined. It is all pretence. The feelings are assumed, but they are as real, in the imaginary circumstances, as if the story were true. And imaginative feelings act on us, and move us, just as if they were genuine. They are genuine. What matters is not whether they spring from real facts or from fiction. What matters is that they should be generous and noble feelings. A great novelist, like a great poet, is a man of great capacity for fine and delicate feelings. Imagination quickens his emotion, and emotion lends power and vividness to his style. Here is another test of a great novel. Does it move the heart?

There is another quality which we look for in a novel written in English, and that is humour. There are many great novels by German, Russian and Scandinavian authors which are serious from beginning to end, but, whilst we may respect their imaginative and emotional power, we don't really love them. What we really love in a novel is humour. If it be true, as the Frenchman said, that the English like to take their pleasures sadly, it is equally true that we like to take our sorrows humorously. There is no great writer of fiction in English who has not seen life somehow as a thing to rejoice in, and to laugh at. What is humour, fun, the comic spirit, or whatever name you like to describe it by? Isn't it really courage? I don't mean bravery, but I do mean the spirit that animates men to face life and difficulties, and other people, pleasant and unpleasant. It may take the shape of wit, as when, animated by high spirits, people speak more intelligently and amusingly than they usually do. Or it may mean the

power of seeing the laughable side of human nature with all its inconsistencies, and the pleasant and humorous way of looking at dangerous and even tragical situations. That is a quality which makes life worth living, and it is a quality which is worth having in a novel. For life is not all gloom; and humour will enable us to see that.

And lastly, a novel should have some conscious aim. It may be simply to delight us with a story, or to draw a portrait of a character, or to make us think about some problem of conduct, or some social problem of the day. It may be to make us think, or it may be simply to take us to the land of make-believe, there to entertain us with harmless amusement for a few hours. But some aim, which gives it unity, and to which every character and every scene tend, that a novel must have, or it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

There may be other elements in a great novel. Very likely there are. But these five will be found in most novels which have stood the test of time: lifelike characters, vivid scenes, passion, humour, and lastly, a purpose.

## XII

### SONG AND ODE

**H**AVE you ever noticed that when people are tremendously uplifted about anything they burst into song. It is a song made by someone else that they sing, but there are so many of these songs that there are enough and to spare for every mood. Songs have become associated with happiness, so that when people want to seem happy, whether they really are or not, they sing. At parties, someone is sure to be asked to sing, and he or she will have to comply; whether he go to it like a professional singer with the assurance of an expert at the game, or whether he protest that he is not in very good voice to-night, or he hasn't brought his music; or that Miss Smith is present, and really she sings so much better. Soldiers sing on the march. Rotarians sing at lunch. In church, in school, in club, in public-house, people are for ever singing. And what an effect it has upon the spirits! Do you know that poem by Siegfried Sassoon in which he tells how song affected him:

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;  
And I was filled with such delight  
As prisoned birds must find in freedom  
Winging wildly across the white  
Orchards and dark-green fields; on, on, and out of sight.

Singing does that, doesn't it? When you are happy, bursting into song seems the proper and natural thing to do. It communicates your happiness to the world. And

when you hear song, if you are in tune to its mood, or if the singer can compel you to his mood, your heart thrills with delight. You seem to be lifted by some invisible force quite out of yourself. You feel so intensely that you do not seem to be *you*, and it is only when the feeling dies away that you come back to earth, changed and gladdened by the experience.

In any song there are words, and there is music. In the ideal song the words and the music would be made together by the composer. But most poets are not musicians, and most musicians are not poets, so that what usually happens is that one person makes the words, and another person makes the music to fit the spirit of the words. Making songs that can be sung, or making poems that are like songs because they are so full of emotion, is one of the great divisions of poetry, and such poets are known as lyrical poets.

Now why do poets write songs? They write them because they feel the pleasure which you feel when you hear, or when you read, their song. This pleasure proceeds from some emotion. It may be an immediate personal feeling such as joy.

My heart is like a singing bird  
Whose nest is in a watered shoot;  
My heart is like an appletree  
Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;  
My heart is like a rainbow shell  
That paddles in a halcyon sea;  
My heart is gladder than all these  
Because my love is come to me.

That stanza is from a song called "A Birthday", by Christina Rossetti. It almost makes its own tune, doesn't

it? You feel that if you were a musician, you could very easily set it to music. And the poetry of joy has that characteristic. It seems to sing. But the poetic emotion need not necessarily be an immediate joy. It can be a pleasure derived from hope or longing or resolve, a pleasure of expectation, as in that poem by John Masefield called "Sea Fever".

I must down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,  
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,  
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and white sail's  
    shaking,  
And a grey mist on the sea's face and a grey dawn breaking.

Or it can spring from the opposite of joy; from grief, or from hate. Here is Charles Lamb lamenting the loss of his friends—

I have had playmates, I have had companions  
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days;  
    All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

Some they have died, and some they have left me,  
And some are taken from me; all are departed;  
    All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

This kind of lyrical poetry, and it is the simplest, and perhaps the pleasantest, communicates the poet's genuine and personal emotions. But imaginative feelings can be just as real, and perhaps even more pleasant than genuine and immediate feelings. And hence it is possible to write lyrics about imaginary characters and about their feelings, and about imaginary things. A good many of the old ballads were lyrics of this sort, and during the so-called

Romantic period, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, poets delighted in this kind of feeling. You are sure to be familiar with Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner", and you probably know that marvellous poem of Keats, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", so I will not attempt to quote them, but I wonder if you know this little fairy tale by Sir Walter Scott. It always seems to me a marvel of imagination and rhythm, as surprising and as magical as anything in the poems I have just alluded to.

Proud Maisie is in the wood,  
Walking so early;  
Sweet Robin sits on the bush  
Singing so rarely.

You have to know the song of the robin to realize the full flavour of that. It means an autumn morning, fallen leaves under the trees, a thin mist, and the plaintive warble of the little brown bird with the scarlet breast. Proud Maisie speaks, and the robin answers.

"Tell me, thou bonny bird,  
When shall I marry me?"  
"When six braw gentlemen  
Kirkward shall carry ye."

It might be a splendid wedding, but listen.

"Who makes the bridal bed,  
Birdie, say truly?"  
"The grey-headed sexton  
That delves the grave duly.  
"The glow-worm o'er grave and stone  
Shall light thee steady;  
The owl from the steeple sing  
Welcome, proud lady."

Many of the most splendid lyrics are imaginative. I wonder if you know Chesterton's "Lepanto", or Kipling's "The Last Chantey." But it is possible to sing about wonderful things without making a story about them: to picture them for their beauty and for their significance alone. There is feeling in pictures of things, or in "images," as word-pictures are called; and many modern lyrics are just images, pictures of things. Here is a poem by John Drinkwater which explains what I mean. It is called "Symbols."

I saw history in a poet's song,  
In a river reach and a gallows-hill,  
In a bridal bed, and a secret wrong,  
In a crown of thorns: in a daffodil.

I imagined measureless time in a day,  
And starry space in a wagon-road,  
And the treasure of all good harvests lay  
In a single seed that the sower sowed.

My garden-wind had driven and havened again  
All ships that ever had gone to sea,  
And I saw the glory of all dead men  
In the shadow that went by the side of me.

If you can follow the imagination of that, you can see the meaning of Mr. Ralph Hodgson's poem, "The Bull," or Mr. John Masefield's "Cargoes."

Stately Spanish galleon coming from the Isthmus,  
Dipping through the Tropics by the palm-green shores  
With a cargo of diamonds,  
Emeralds, amethysts,  
Topazes, and cinnamon, and gold moidores.



Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke stack,  
Butting through the Channel in the mad March days  
With a cargo of Tyne coal,  
Road rails, pig lead,  
Firewood, ironware, and cheap tin trays.

And there is richer feeling in images of the past, or in rare and unseen things; because such images are remote, and are therefore liberated from the unpleasant and seamy side of their real nature. They are isolated, and seen in sunshine; never in the light of common day.

Moreover, since the feeling behind lyrical poetry may be no less imaginative than real, it is possible to make songs which celebrate great occasions. We must all have felt our hearts thrill on the occasion of some great national rejoicing, or when some hero has captured our imagination by some splendid deed of endurance or courage. Poets' hearts thrill too, and the writing of impassioned songs, or "odes," as they are called, is one of the oldest and most historical kinds of lyrical poetry. One of the earliest Greek poets, named Pindar, wrote odes celebrating the winners of foot-races and chariot-races in the athletic sports of ancient Greece. If he had lived to-day, he would have celebrated victories on the racecourse, the football-field, and the cricket-pitch. During the Middle Ages kings had their court poets; and the office of poet laureate is a relic of a time when poets were honoured for composing poems upon state occasions. You must be familiar with some of these occasional poems, at least with Spenser's "Prothalamion" and "Epithalamion," with Milton's "Christmas Ode," Marvell's "Horatian Ode," Dryden's "Odes for St. Cecilia's Day," Campbell's "Battle of the Baltic"; and, if so, you will realize that it is just as possible for a solemn or a mournful occasion to be celebrated, as

an occasion of congratulation or joy. You must have heard these well-known lines from Mr. Laurence Binyon's magnificent Elegy "For the Fallen."

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them.

Some people think that it is rare for occasional poetry to be truly great. They think that true poetry cannot be written to order; but must be written when, and only when, it springs from impulse. But why should not a great national or civic occasion provide a poetic impulse? Because Tennyson's "Ode for the Exhibition of 1862," or Alfred Austin's "Ode on the Relief of Mafeking" missed fire, it does not follow that all have missed the mark. A poet who can only communicate his own private feelings is an individualist who has still something to learn not only about patriotism, but about the art of poetry.

Yet another kind of lyric is the poem addressed to someone or to something. It was quite an early development of song. A love song, for instance, was found to turn quite naturally into an invitation, or a supplication, or advice to the person to whom it was written. You remember Marlowe's poem, "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love."

Come live with me and be my Love,  
And we will all the pleasures prove  
That hills and valleys, dale and field,  
And all the craggy mountains yield.  
There will we sit upon the rocks  
And see the shepherds feed their flocks,  
By shallow rivers, to whose falls  
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

Well, it is only a step from that to Crashaw's lovely  
"Wishes for the Supposed Mistress."

A face that's best  
By its own beauty drest,  
And can alone commend the rest:

A face made up  
Out of no other shop  
Than what Nature's white hand sets ope . . .

Days that need borrow  
No part of their good morrow  
From a forspent night of sorrow:

Days, that in spite  
Of darkness, by the light  
Of a clear mind, are day all night.

Life, that dares send  
A challenge to his end,  
And when it comes, say "Welcome, friend."

And consequently, from the time of Horace down to the present day, there have been poems which are simply versified letters from the poet to his friends. Milton's sonnets are frequently addresses of this kind. Once this kind of lyric was established and had a respectable ancestry, it was easy to pass from the friend to something regarded as a friend. Just as the writers of odes could pass from real occasions to such imaginary occasions as Gray celebrated in "The Bard" and in "The Progress of Poesy," so the writers of addresses could pass from real friends to such imaginings as Herrick's "To Daffodils."

Fair Daffodils, we weep to see  
You haste away so soon:  
As yet the early-rising Sun  
Has not attained his noon.  
Stay, stay,  
Until the hasting day  
Has run  
But to the even-song;  
And, having pray'd together, we  
Will go with you along.

Or to Collins's "Ode to Evening," or Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty," or to Shelley's intense and fierce "Ode to the West Wind."

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,  
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead  
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,  
Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is  
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!  
Be through my lips to unawakened earth  
The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,  
If Winter comes, Can Spring be far behind?

In idea there may be something artificial in Burns's apostrophizing a Field Mouse or a Mountain Daisy, but there is nothing artificial in the feeling which these poems communicate. Some of the most splendid victories of lyrical poetry have been won in this field. There are no more splendid outbursts of passion, in language which is sheer beauty of imagery and verbal music, than Keats's Odes "To Autumn," "To a Nightingale," and "To a Grecian Urn." They are the very summit of lyrical poetry in English, and until one has read them, and read them

aloud, one does not know to what heights lyrical poetry can reach. And yet they are, in form, imaginative odes, poetical addresses.

And lastly, feeling can pass into thought; and feeling can be awakened from memory, and breed thoughts which are not so much logical conclusions as intuitions, feelings that have the validity of thoughts. Out of lyrical poetry springs reflective poetry, the wisdom of poetic inspiration. This is surely the highest kind of lyrical poetry, for it is surely in the fact that it can convey that wisdom which is the fruit of understanding, that poetry excels. If you want pictures, poetry is challenged by drawing and painting, which offer something more concrete and tangible. If melody is what you are in search of, poetry is beaten by music. But poetry can be thoughtful. It can communicate the language of the soul in a fabric woven of words. Here is the richest development of song. It is not song, of course. Very few reflective poems will sing themselves naturally to music. There is something prosaic about reflective poetry, but it lasts better than song. One tires of a song and passes on, but one goes back to reflective poetry, whether it be a sonnet by Shakespeare, or Gray's "Elegy," or a poem of Wordsworth. There is always something more to be found in it, whether it be a simplicity, like

My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky:

So was it when my life began,

So is it now I am a man,

So be it when I shall grow old,

Or let me die.

The child is father of the man:

And I could wish my days to be

Bound each to each by natural piety.

And to know what "natural piety" means, you need to know Wordsworth. Or whether it be a paradox, like this little poem by the Chinese poet Su Tung-p'o—written about the time when William the Conqueror was crushing our Saxon forefathers—upon the birth of his son.

Families, when a child is born,  
Want it to be intelligent.  
I, through intelligence,  
Having wrecked my whole life,  
Only hope the baby will prove  
Ignorant and stupid.  
Then he will crown a tranquil life  
By becoming a Cabinet Minister.<sup>1</sup>

As Shelley said, "All high poetry is infinite. . . . Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed."

That is what lyrical poetry is. It springs from an impulse in the poet's mind which develops emotion, and this emotion frequently leads to thought. And the pleasure of the emotion and the thought are so vivid and so startling, that the poet cannot rest until he has communicated them in the form of rhythmical language answering to the conception in his mind. He may write a lyric to be sung by a single voice. That is a song. He may write a song to be sung by a grand chorus of voices. That is an ode. He may write a poem to be read. That is a reflective poem. But however he writes it, you will find that there is emotion behind what he writes, and this emotion is communicated in rhythmical phrases which have shaped

1. Translated by Arthur Waley in *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, (Constable) p. 98.

themselves into a form that is ordered and sustained to its end. Lyrical poetry is written in language that is shaped and refined by the feeling behind. Lyrical poetry is shaped into a form that is in itself beautiful. And that, I think, is what Coleridge meant when he defined poetry as "the best words in the best order."

## XIII

### ROMANCE

**H**AVE you ever seen the silver track across the sea to the full moon, or white cottages looking a bluish green in the moonlight, or a dusk when common objects take on an unfamiliar aspect and seem strange; or a still, sunny summer afternoon, when in the lengthening shadows everything seems so calm and happy and peaceful that there might be no such evils as fear, weariness and anxiety in the world; or the sea framed between two wooded headlands, with gorse in golden blossom and fragrant scent running down to the cliff; or craggy mountains rearing their majestic summits above the forests which cling to them like a mantle, and frowning down on deep and silent mountain-pools? If you have, you have felt romance.

Have you ever felt a thrill as the match was won on the stroke of time; have you ever felt suspense as the big fellow seemed to have the little one in his power, and victory seemed hopeless, until, by dint of sheer courage and endurance, the little fellow not only held his own, but turned the tables on the other? Have you ever, secure yet in the midst of danger, seen sharks follow your boat? Have you ever been in some historical city such as Rome, London or Paris, and, in some old building or some old street, have you thought of the pageant of history that once unfolded there? Have you stood in the centre of some great modern city watching the ebb and flow of the tide of humanity, and thinking what stories of courage and



degradation are bound up in the faces, and in the neatness or the shabbiness of the surging crowd? Have you ever speculated on the future of yourself, or your country, or mankind? Have you ever wondered what the world will look like, if you could return in two hundred, and two thousand, and two million years? If you have, you have felt romance.

Have you ever imagined yourself as an explorer in distant lands or on uncharted seas, or the hero of a battle or a hospital tent, or a martyr, whether in the Coliseum lifting your eyes to the light as the hungry lions bound into the arena, or on some coral strand where grass-kilted niggers dance around a missionary bound to a stake? Have you seen yourself as a royalist in the time of the French Revolution? Have you fought in the Crusades? Were you one of Cromwell's Ironsides? Have you gone west in the United States, facing redskins and rattlesnakes, killing bison, and finding gold? Have you visited the court of the Caliph Haroun al Raschid in Baghdad? And did you stand under the threat of instant decapitation by a giant Nubian slave armed with a huge naked scimitar? If you have, you know what romance is.

And what is it, if we have to put it into words? For, saying that it is imagination is not quite true. Imagination need not necessarily be romantic. And romance, as we have seen, may spring from real life, no less than from imagination. What is romance? Well, like most literary terms, it is difficult to define satisfactorily, because one can never say all there is to be said about it. But if we have caught it, and caught it all, in our glimpses of romance—and there's the rub, for romance is the bird of happiness which the more we follow, the further it flies

away—if we have caught it, romance is life seen in its most beautiful and wonderful moments; and romance is life seen not as it ordinarily is, but life as it might be, if it were full of courage and idealism and wonder. Romance is that which is something more wonderful than ordinary life. Romance is an escape from dulness and unpleasantness and hardship into life with a new and richer aspect; or even into an historical, or an ideal, life that exists only in the imagination. Romance is an escape from present environment. Romance is day-dream.

To hear it defined like that may be shocking to some people. It seems like a lie or an illusion. It looks like cowardice to leave the battle in which we are engaged, even to stand on a mountain top and gain a more extensive view; and much more, to turn aside from the fight to gain fresh strength for the struggle. To forsake truth for fantasy! Yes, that is what romance is. It is exaggeration. It is dream. It is illusion! It is all that, but it is something more. It is childhood. It is vitality. It is health. Romance is the spirit of childhood. It may or it may not be true, as Wordsworth said, that

Heaven lies about us in our infancy,

but there is a glory and a dream about life in childhood and youth, which fades as we grow older into the light of common day. We gain maturity with experience, but we are in danger of losing the richest gift that life bestows, the freshness of delight and wonder.

Childhood, with its innocent heart, exaggerates and imagines, but its exaggerations and its imaginings are delightful and wholesome, finding uncommon and wonderful aspects in everyday forms. The spirit of

childhood may renounce its myths and fairy tales—though I hope there will be always some left who love them—but it will still continue to make fantastic and wonderful stories. And in those fantastic and wonderful stories there is delight and health, which come straight from the freshness and idealism of childhood. Childhood lives intensely in imagination; whilst men and women exist in a reality of obstinate questionings and blank misgivings. As long as there are children, and as long as there is romance to bring back to the grown world the spirit of childhood, life will still retain those glorious illusions which make it a thing of beauty; and in Lamb's words: "Imagination shall not have spread her holy wings totally to fly the earth." Romance is life as imagination says it might be.

Romance, like all thought and all art, changes in fashion. Only emotions remain unchanged by time. Sometimes the land of illusion is full of adventure, sometimes the dream is a quiet haven far away from the turmoil and questioning of life. For, ever since civilization became recorded in history there have been, and there may be again, times when men have grown tired of the complexities of civilization, and have turned from political discontent and economic misery to find in romance a contentment and health which were lacking in their own environment. Romance flourishes in ages of discontent and revolt. Romance is a safety valve. Romance is a substitute for revolution.

Why do poets write romances? I think we can give the answer. They write them because they find a pleasure in imagining life as it might be. They find delight and happiness in letting the fancy roam in the never-never land of make-believe. But there is this difference between poetry

and romance. Poetry exists by feeling, though there may be imagination, too; and as the great elementary feelings of joy, grief and hate remain the same in all ages, poetry never grows old-fashioned. The great poems of the past are as fresh to-day as when they were first written. But romance is chiefly imagination, and the fiction that delights one age will bore another. If the romances of the past are still read with pleasure, it is because of the undying spirit of the emotions and sentiments which were present at their creation. Let us have a look at some of the fields in which romantic imagination has wandered, for the fields are still there, though the boundaries have altered a little in the course of years, and the methods of cultivation have been improved.

A school of Greek poets, connected with Sicily in the third and second centuries before Christ, the chief of whom was Theocritus, invented a literary form which has affinities with both drama and ode, namely the "idyll", or little poem dealing with the emotions of Sicilian shepherds and goatherds. At Rome in the reign of Augustus, Virgil imitated these country dialogues in his *Eclogues*, but with a difference. Virgil's shepherds became conventional and artificial. Sometimes he wrote these poems in order to allegorize his own life and to comment on public affairs; and he and his readers found the romance of shepherd life an escape from the unpleasant reality of the decay of peasant-life in Italy owing to slave-labour, and from the turmoil of an overcrowded and ostentatious and a superstitious Rome. Pastoral poems were followed by prose pastoral romances. The first one that we know was written by a Greek called Longus, probably in the second century A.D., and is called *Daphnis and Chloe*. It is the romantic

story of two children exposed as babes on the island of Lesbos: for in those days parents who wished to get rid of unwanted children simply put them down in some distant place, and left them there. These children were lucky enough to be found by compassionate peasants; they grew up as goatherd and shepherdess, fell in love, underwent many adventures, and eventually, after they had been discovered to be the long lost children of rich parents who did want them after all, they married and were very happy. It was a pleasant tale, and it conveyed the pleasing illusion that shepherds are simpler, happier and healthier than the people who live in cities. It is no wonder then that in later ages the romance of shepherd life has been felt by novelists.

From the Renaissance to the eighteenth century, pastoral romances were very much in fashion, with Arcadia as the scene—Arcadia the sunny never-never land of romance. The story mattered little to the readers of these tales. It was the rocky scenery and the idyllic life of brown shepherds clad in goat-skins, tending their woolly sheep among the mountains, piping jolly melodies on the hillsides whilst shepherdesses danced to their reedy strains—shepherds suffering the keen pangs of unrequited love because of the proud disdain of blue-eyed shepherdesses. It was Arcady that attracted. And even now, out of fashion though it be, we can feel still something of the imaginative charm which pervaded these pastoral romances, the romance which led even princesses and their friends in the age of Louis XIV, to carry beribboned crooks and pretend to be shepherdesses, the romance which expressed itself again and again in portrait painting, and finally in the eighteenth century expired in the landscapes of Watteau and the china shepherdesses of Dresden.

It was artificial, of course, and it became an affectation, but is it any the worse for that? It seems as if some literary convention of this sort is always pleasing to the over-civilized people who live in cities. Hence the romance of chivalry, the historical novel, tales of mystery, horror and the detection of crime, the vogue of the buccaneer and the gypsy, and the cult of the South Seas and the Wild West. Men embrace these happy illusions to cheer them through life from the dullness of their livelihood and the follies of their politicians and economists, and, as long as we recognize and respect them as happy artificialities, they are not only harmless and entertaining, they are refreshing and recreative. And pastoralism is not dead. It still lives on in a modern guise in novels such as *Lorna Doone*, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, and *Far From the Madding Crowd*.

In the Middle Ages, when the feudal system flourished and knighthood was in flower, there grew up the ideal conception of the true knight. He was a wanderer in search of adventures, but they were adventures in which he was to fight to right the wrong, to force criminals to penitence, and infidels to the faith, to help the oppressed, and to liberate the wronged captive. He was also a great lover. He loved beauty and purity and kindness, and he gave his heart where he loved, without thought of gain or advancement. Far were it from him to marry simply for money. So that often it was years before he was rich and powerful enough to marry the lady of his choice, and often he had to do great deeds and undergo adventures imposed upon him for her sake. But he wore some token of her favour, such as a flower or a glove, and he always remained true to her because he valued her as the most peerless amongst women, and thought the fact that she

loved him was the greatest boon that life could bestow. In battle he was brave. In conduct he was truthful and honourable, courteous and generous. He was a gentleman.

And later, as knighthood decayed into the command of mercenary troops, and when merchants and aldermen were admitted to the order, the lays and romances of the minstrels of the Middle Ages were retold as prose romances of chivalry. Sir Thomas Malory told romances of King Arthur and his knights in his *Morte d'Arthur*. Lord Berners told a romance of Charlemagne in his *Huon of Bordeaux*. Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde printed a score of such romances. It was a new kind of literature. Chivalrous love had been celebrated in the Middle Ages by the troubadours, chivalrous lays had been sung by the minstrels, but that was poetry; and sometimes it was not even poetry, but history clouded with fiction. There was romance in the poetry of the Middle Ages, in the *Chanson de Roland*, in the *Nibelungenlied*, in *Aucassin et Nicolette*, and in the romances of Chretien de Troyes and his imitators. It was the same order but not the same kind of romance as the detective story in our own age. It was improbable, but it was credible, granted a belief in magic. But the prose romances of chivalry offered romance of a new kind. Gunpowder had been invented. Soldiers were no longer bowmen and men-at-arms; they were infantry, cavalry and artillery. The armed knight, whether in chain-armour or plate, was an anachronism. The prose romance of chivalry took the reader into the past, into an unreal and exclusively aristocratic world peopled by names, wonderful names of three syllables, like Agravaine, Bedivere, Meliagraunce, and Sagramore, where these names in chapter after chapter did gallantry after gallantry. Plot

mattered little to readers of these romances. It was the thought of a hardy warrior in rich plate-armour of the latest fashion, and vizored helmet surmounted by a panache, mounted on a horse which was as richly encumbered with armour as himself, couching his spear, spurring his horse, and rushing headlong to attack some craven or caitiff knight, liberating damsels in distress, undertaking some quest or heroic enterprise on their behalf, and doing aristocratic and knightly deeds. They found romance in chivalry.

And even now we can still hear the call of romance in these feudal legends. We value the ideal of the gentleman. Cervantes ridiculed knight-errantry and gave the *coup de grâce* to the prose romance for three centuries, but he did not kill the spirit of romance with *Don Quixote*. It still lives on in novels of our own age such as *The Forest Lovers*, *The White Company*, and *Bardelys the Magnificent*. Many historical novels about the Middle Ages are simply prose romances; and chivalry is very much alive, both in drama and in picture-film.

The dark days of revolutionary turmoil at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth saw romance turn to two new fields, the tale of mystery and horror and the historical novel. The tale of mystery presents some horror that chills the blood, harrows the soul, and terrifies the nerves. And in that horror there is a mystery which is so presented that the reader is continually guessing the solution, and perhaps a wrong solution, before the end. Mystery, excitement and suspense are the qualities which endear it to readers who find therein something which is lacking in their own lives. It is represented in modern times by the detective story.



The historical novel finds romance in the past. The past in its ideal form, purged of all its most sordid features, becomes the world in which we live as we read; and in that world some story of honour and love and arms is enacted, with which, in imagination, we are associated as we read. It is perhaps the greatest of all the forms of romance, because it comes most near to truth. It can include the beauty of a picturesque setting, like pastoralism. It can include chivalry, and even mystery and horror. It can portray character, and bring out the difference between human beings in type and in temperament as does the novel. It is free of the present, and can therefore select and idealize to a higher degree than a novel about real life, provided that its presentation of facts, as far as they are introduced, is true. The same perhaps might be said about a romance dealing with life in the future, with this difference: the reader does know something about the past, however little; about the future he knows nothing. Satisfying characters, a picturesque and beautiful story, and fidelity in the representation; can you expect more from fiction? Perhaps you can. Intensity and truth of feeling. The appearance of reality. But even these a great historical novel can give you.

We do wrong to despise the historical novel. We do wrong to despise romance. Romance is imagination. Romance is delight. Romance is recreation. To those who love romance, the world is a never-failing source of wonder. Those who love romance will never be bored. If you would keep young, never let go your hold on romance. But keep your hold on poetry, too, for romance without poetry, without truth to human nature and sincerity of feeling, is the most hollow sham—the most futile and absurd mockery

## ROMANCE

of good criminals, noble bandits, aristocratic gypsies and generous pirates—that the great and wonderful gift of imagination, unconscientiously misused, can produce.

And now to illustrate what I have said, I want you to refer to that poem of Coleridge's called "Kubla Khan." You will see from his note prefixed to it that it communicates a romantic image. He had been thinking about Kubla Khan's palace. He fell asleep and saw it in a dream. On awaking, he wrote this poem, and would have written more, if he had not been disturbed by that "person from Porlock." It is verse. It is written in metrical lines which rhyme. Yet it is not lyrical poetry. There is no deep feeling or mood inspiring it. It is not reflective poetry. There is no sentiment or thought in it. It is not fiction. It does not tell a story with character and plot. Then what is it?

It is an image, a picture in the mind's eye expressed in words. Can you see it with its palace and its walls and its river? It is a romantic image because it is grand and picturesque. It ends with the conclusion that if the poet, through the agency of the music of the Abyssinian maid, could communicate his vision in full, the world would regard him with veneration as someone inspired and holy.

For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

I want you to consider two questions. Firstly, is there any value in a poem which is so remote from reality as this? And, secondly, if it has a value, what is that value?

## XIV

### EPIC POETRY

**W**E live in a state of society which is ordered and cohesive. We feel that we are all members of the nation to which we belong, and our loyalty is so strong that we are willing to sacrifice a good deal of personal liberty in order to obey its laws. Our forefathers have lived like this for generations, and a peaceable, ordered way of living seems the normal life of man. If we want adventure, we go out to find it in the polar regions, or in the equatorial deserts. We only fight in a war when the safety of the state is threatened by a foreign domination. The ideal citizen is the intelligent, industrious, law-abiding worker.)

But it has not always been so, and it may not be so again. There have been times in the history of the human race when there was very little political union between people who spoke the same language. The race, or the nation it may be, broke down into tribes. Amongst the same people and in the same land, community was sundered from community, not simply because they were separated geographically, but because there was no political cohesion. The nation was divided into tribes. They were not savages. They had a religion, or at least some supernatural explanation of the meaning of life and death. They had a morality, or at least a code of honour within the tribe. They had art, for they decorated their weapons, houses and dress; and they loved to hear stories told aloud and poetry recited. They had certain institutions such as

marriage, the ownership of land and property, trade and commerce. And they had their tribal law, that is to say, their morality and their institutions had the sanction of tradition and custom, and those who broke the law were punished. But they were not civilized. They did not think politically. They had no economics, and no leisure for the cultivation of science and learning. They had no system of banking and no possibility of investment. All their wealth was in gold and flocks, and in houses and the simplest machines.

Now I want you to think for a moment about tribes living in a state of society like that. Who would be the ideal man of the tribe? Would it not be a man, whether he were priest or judge or warrior, who could protect and enrich the tribe? In such a state of society the ideal man is not the industrious, law-abiding worker, but the intelligent leader of men. The ideal man of the tribe is the good chief or king, just in his dealings within the tribe, fierce in war and a bringer of victory; but above all a leader, bold and powerful to direct and compel, a man with a personality which is strong enough to compel obedience and wise enough to merit it.

But what has that to do with epic poetry, you ask. Just this. It is in that state of social life that epic poetry naturally arises. The bard tells the heroic stories of the great adventurers of his own or some related tribe. That is probably how the Homeric epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, first came into existence. That is how the Anglo-Saxon poem of *Beowulf* and the Old French poem, *La Chanson de Roland*, were written. That is what the old Icelandic sagas were. And that is the meaning of the old English ballads of Robin Hood, and the Scottish ballads

of heroes, such as "The Battle of Otterburn" and "Kinmont Willie."

Later there comes a time when tribal life gives way to national life, when civilization arises with city life, centralized government, wealth, leisure, amusement and philosophy, when life becomes rational, and democratic sentiment arises against aristocratic privilege and the traditional social order. The bard and the minstrel disappear. The spoken word gives way to the written book. Literature takes its place amongst the new arts of painting, drama and music. The epic gives way to drama and lyrical poetry, and later still to the novel and reflective poetry. Epics may still be written, but they are literary epics, and not the real epics of the heroic age. That was how Virgil's *Aeneid* came to be written. However great it may be, we must never forget that it follows Homer. That was how Dante's *Divine Comedy* was inspired. If there had been no Virgil, and, above all, if there had been no Latin hymns of the church, there would have been no epic vision of heaven and hell. *Paradise Lost* is a literary epic, and so is the greatest epic of our own times, *The Dynasts*, by Thomas Hardy. Indeed, *The Dynasts* is so literary that it is an attempt to put an epic conception into dramatic form.

Epic poetry naturally arises in an heroic age. It tells the stories of the heroic deeds of leaders of men. It tells of conflict and of quest. It is epic because it is narrative. It is poetry because the poets who wrote it felt deeply, and communicated their feelings. They sing not only of action. They sing of ardour and resentment, of friendship and paternal love, of betrayal and grief, of death and sorrow, as well as of success and rejoicing. And it is poetry

whether it is written in the swift hexameters of Homer, the alliterative verse of the Germanic poets, the decasyllabic verse of the *Chanson de Roland* and later epics, or the prose of the sagamen of Iceland.

And since epic poetry represents heroism in action, it is of great interest to us, not only for its poetry, which is at times magnificent, but for its representation of the life of those times. We can find out a great deal about the social life, the customs and the ideals, of men in a feudal state of society from the ancient epics. And the fact emerges quite clearly that the warrior of those times was not merely a giant exulting in his brute strength. He was a gentleman. Even in those wild days, when houses were sacked and the inhabitants put to the sword, there was a code of honour. It was not a Christian morality, and it allowed some very cruel deeds. For instance, Achilles, the hero of the *Iliad*, when he had slain his great adversary, Hector, the Trojan hero, tied his corpse by the ankles with thongs of ox-hide to his chariot, and dragged the body behind him in the dust back to the Grecian camp. But it *was* a code of honour. There were some things which a warrior could not do. There were others that he must do, even if it meant death.

Achilles was most directly and deeply insulted by his superior, Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek forces. He could not challenge him. He could not act as a traitor. What does he do? He draws off his forces, and remains neutral until he is spurred to fight again by the death of his friend Patroclus at the hands of Hector. Then he fights again to avenge his friend. A hero could not refuse a challenge. If he was dared to do a deed, he had to do it. In the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*, the hero is challenged to a swimming match in the Baltic Sea by another hero

named Breca. Breca led for five days and five nights, but Beowulf followed, though he was attacked by a shark or a sea monster of some ferocious kind, and only desisted when a storm from the north separated him from his challenger, and drove him across to Jutland. If he were engaged in battle, he could not honourably withdraw. The *Chanson de Roland* is the story of how Roland, the nephew of Charlemagne, and leader of the rearguard in the retreat from Spain, was attacked by an overwhelming force of Saracens, through the treachery of a recreant peer named Ganelon; and how he fought to the death, blowing his horn with his last breath to summon the main body of Charlemagne's army to return. The hero must be brave and he must be loyal. He could not be a coward and he could not be a traitor. He was courteous in his behaviour, generous to his friends, and honest; though to an enemy he might be cunning or abusive. Charlemagne had the hands and feet of the traitor Ganelon tied to four horses who dragged him asunder.

Epic poetry is of interest too because there is usually some historical foundation for the story. The *Iliad* tells of the siege of Troy by the Greeks. The poem is not a history of that siege. Indeed the siege is only the scene or setting for the combats and feasts, and the intervention of the Greek gods on both sides, which make up the twenty-four poems of the great epic. The real subject of the poem is the anger of Achilles, what happened in the war when he retired insulted, and how he renounced his wrath, and the consequences. But it is not all romance. The excavations of archaeologists have proved that there really was a Troy, and moreover that it was destroyed and burned. Whether there ever was a Beowulf, the thane of Hygelac.

King of the Geats, has not been established by historical research, but it has proved the very interesting fact that there was a Hygelac, and that he died in a raid against the Franks about A.D. 515. Roland was not a nephew of Charlemagne, he was a Count of Brittany. He was not overwhelmed by Saracens, but by the Gascons, who were Christians. There was no Ganelon. But it is quite true that Charlemagne did make an expedition into Spain, and that Roland was slain with the rearguard. Facts like these do not make the poetry any better. We must not make the mistake of thinking that a story which is intended by a poet to please an audience by its imagination and feeling is any better as a story for being true to fact in its incidents. But facts like these do add an historical interest to the epic. We realise that the ancient epics must have originated from the tales told about a hero after his death, and that imagination improved upon history in exactly the same way as George Washington's life has been improved by the anecdote of the axe and the cherry tree.

But having progressed so far, having realized that the ancient epics are partly history and very much romance, let us consider this question: how did the epics come into being? They are not just the lives of heroes with imaginative adventures. They are poems, or in the instance of the sagas, prose romances. Certain selected incidents are told that all go to make one story about a hero, a story with a beginning and an end. Moreover, they are poems that belong to the dawn of literature in the country of their origin. Probably they were not written down until some time after they were composed. The poets of an heroic age were also reciters and minstrels. They composed their epics and ballads, memorized them, and then recited



them in palace and hall, and even in the market-place. Their memory must have been enormous. There were rhapsodists in the ancient Greek world who could recite the whole of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. There were sagamen in ancient Iceland who could recite from memory the *Saga of Burnt Njal*, which is as long as a long novel. The *Chanson de Roland* contains 4000 verses. But they remembered it, and the first one to remember it was the minstrel who composed it. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are exceptional. They are exceedingly long, and they are exceptionally good. In fact they are so well arranged as stories, and narrated with such eloquence, and their versification is so fine, that they have become the classical examples of what an epic should be; and all literary epics from the days of Virgil onwards, and even before, have imitated them to a greater or a lesser extent. They are exceptional because they are not in their original state, like *Beowulf*, and the *Chanson de Roland* and the ballads. They have certainly been edited; and, in the form in which we know them, they are almost certainly a literary adaptation of earlier poems.

Which brings us to the question of style; for in the style of Homer, and in the style of the great literary epics, the *Aeneid* and *Paradise Lost*, there is an epic style which is the most magnificent way of treating an imaginative subject that poets have ever produced. It is a style which is eloquent. It delights in poetical epithets and in sonorous and musical words. It delights in imagery, and often illustrates an incident with a comparison which is a perfectly drawn, complete picture in words, a picture as it were within a picture. It is a style which, if it may not be described as simple, is lucid even in its loftiness. It may describe in a roundabout way, but it never uses many

words where a few will do. If it is not swift—and terse it is at times—it is always direct and restrained. It is the very perfection of fineness, fluency and force in language, and hence it is that the great epics are worth studying for their style alone. Even if we find their subjects dull and the romance faded, we cannot fail to be impressed by the dignity and nobility of their style.

Let me quote a few passages to show what I mean when I speak of the dignity and eloquence of epic style.

Here is a selection from Homer's account of the combat between Menelaus, son of Atreus, the Greek champion, and Paris, also called Alexander, the son of Priam, King of Troy, in the third book of the *Iliad*:—

Now when they were marshalled, the several companies with their captains, the Trojans came on with clamour and with a cry like birds, even as the clamour of cranes ariseth before the face of heaven when they flee from wintry storms and measureless rain, and with clamour fly toward the streams of ocean, bearing slaughter and death to pigmy men, and in the early dawn they offer evil battle. But the Greeks came on in silence, breathing fury, eager at heart to bear aid to each other. As when the South Wind sheds a mist over the peaks of a mountain, a mist which the shepherd loves not, but which to the robber is better than night, and a man can see only as far as he can cast a stone; even in such a wise rose the rolling dust from beneath their feet as they went, and swiftly they marched across the plain.

Now when the hosts had come nigh each other, among the Trojans there stood forth as champion the godlike Alexander, bearing on his shoulders a panther skin and a curved bow and a sword, and moreover he had two spears tipped with bronze. He challenged all the best of the Greeks to fight with him in splendid conflict. And when Menelaus, the valiant, perceived him as he came forth with long strides, then as a lion rejoices when he comes upon a mighty carcass, having found a horned

stag or a wild goat when he is hungry, and greedily he devours it, even if swift dogs and agile youth set upon him, even so did Menelaus rejoice when he saw with his eyes the godlike Alexander, for he thought to be avenged on the offender. And straightway he leapt in his armour from his chariot to the ground. . . .

He spake, and raising his long-shafted spear, he cast it, and hit the son of Priam in his round shield. Through the bright shield went the mighty spear, and through the cunningly wrought corselet it forced its way, and straight on past his side the spear cut through his tunic. But Paris turned aside and evaded black fate. Then Menelaus drew his silver-studded sword and, stretching himself up, he drave at the crest of his helmet, but on that it broke in pieces, and in three parts, yea, in four, it fell from his hand.

Then the son of Atreus, looking up to the wide heavens, railed aloud: "O God the father, Zeus, there is not another of the gods more hurtful than thou. I thought to have taken vengeance on this most base Alexander, but now my sword is broken in my hands, my spear has darted from my hand in vain, and I smote him not."

*Iliad*, iii, 1-30, 355-68.

You must have noticed in that passage the descriptive epithets, godlike Alexander, valiant Menelaus, or, as a closer translation would render it, dear to the god of war. And you must have been struck by the similies of the Trojans advancing with cries like a flock of cranes, and of Menelaus advancing on Paris like a lion rejoicing in his prey. Those are characteristic marks of epic style.

Here is a description of a boat-race from the fifth book of Virgil's *Aeneid*:—

Gyas shoots in front of the rest and, amidst confusion and uproar, glides foremost on the waves. Cloanthus follows next, with better oarsmen, but held back by the weight of his ship. After them, at equal distance, the *Dragon* and the

*Centaur* strive to gain the lead. And now the *Dragon* has it, and now the huge *Centaur* passes her, and now both move together with even prows, and plough the salt waves with their long keels. And now they were approaching the pinnacle rock, and were about to round it, when Gyas who was first and leading in the middle of the race, roars at Menoetes, his coxswain: "Why so far to the right? Steer her this way. Hug the shore, and let the oars just touch the rocks on the left, let the others stick to deep water!" So spake he, but Menoetes, fearful of hidden rocks, twists the prow towards the open sea.

"Why so far off the course?" Gyas shouted again, "make for the rocks, Menoetes," when lo! he sees Cloanthus hard behind him, keeping to the nearer course. He grazes his way in on the left between Gyas's bark and the roaring rocks, takes the lead, rounds the goal, and finds safe water.

Then indeed anger burned deep in the youth's very bones, his cheeks were wet with tears, and forgetful alike of decency and the safety of his crew, he hurled the hesitating Menoetes from the poop headlong into the sea. Himself both steersman and commander, he took the helm, cheered on his men, and bends the tiller for the shore.

But Menoetes, emerging after many struggles from the depths, a weary old man in dripping garments, climbed up the reef and sat down on the dry rock. The Trojans laughed as he struggled and swam, and they laugh at him as he spits salt water from his mouth.

*Aeneid*, v, 151-82.

That is a bit of comedy, but here is something more dignified from the sixth book. Anchises, the father of Aeneas, has prophesied the future greatness of Rome, and now he speaks of her peculiar genius:—

Others, I doubt not, shall beat out the breathing brass with finer art, shall carve living faces in marble, shall plead their causes better, shall mark out with a stick the motions of the stars, and tell the rising of the constellations; but do thou,

O Roman, be mindful to have dominion over the nations,  
these shall be thy arts, to impose the law of peace, to be  
merciful to the lesser nations, to conquer the proud.

*Aeneid*, vi, 847-53.

Or as Dryden versifies it—for we must not forget that  
these epics are written in verse:—

Let others better mould the running mass  
Of metals, and inform the breathing brass,  
And soften into flesh a marble face;  
Plead better at the bar; describe the skies,  
And when the stars descend, and when they rise.  
But, Rome! 'tis thine alone, with awful sway,  
To rule mankind, and make the world obey:  
Disposing peace and war thy own majestic way.  
To tame the proud, the fettered slave to free,  
These are imperial arts, and worthy thee.

This dignity and eloquence in the treatment of a noble and heroic subject is rare in English. We suspect eloquence as a cloak to cover a threadbare imagination. But there is one epic in English which has the grand style of Homer and Virgil. I mean *Paradise Lost*. It is the most sonorous and the most expressive blank verse ever written in English by any author. Milton's style is unique. Like Homer's, it may be imitated, for it is so strong and characteristic; but who wants a feeble imitation when we have the original. No English poet maintains such a continued elevation of narrative and decoration as Milton. For dignity of language, beauty of imagery, and splendour of sound, there is nothing like him since Homer and Virgil. In beauty of diction and majesty of rhythm he is as unerring and sure as he is perfect. Shakespeare surpasses him at times, but far oftener he falls below his level. I do not say that

Milton is superior to Shakespeare in romantic imagination or in knowledge of the emotions of the human heart; but I do assert that in his sustained level of sure and flawless excellence, in a choice of words governed to some extent by the exigencies of iambic rhythm, Milton is supreme. And Milton is the one poet in English who has written in the magnificent style of the greatest epics of old. For that alone, for that miraculous gift of high excellence, Milton is worthy of study. It is passages like:—

So spake the apostate angel, though in pain  
Vaunting aloud, but rackt with deep despair.

Bk. i, 125.

Seest thou yon dreary plain, forlorn and wild?

Bk. i, 180.

Thrice he essayed, and thrice in spite of scorn,  
Tears such as angels weep, burst forth: at last  
Words interwove with sighs found out their way.

Bk. i, 619.

Powers and Dominions, Deities of Heav'n,  
For since no deep within her gulf can hold  
Immortal vigour, though opprest and fallen,  
I give not heav'n for lost.

Bk. ii, 11.

The birds their quire apply; airs, vernal airs,  
Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune  
The trembling leaves, while universal Pan,  
Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance,  
Led on th' eternal Spring.

Bk. iv, 264.

It is passages like these that make us realize the supreme magnificence of Milton's style. *Paradise Lost* is the one great epic in English which is worthy to be ranked with

Homer and Virgil; and, apart from all considerations of subject and story, it is worthy of study simply for the noble way in which Milton has treated the subject, in other words, it is worth reading for the style alone.

*Paradise Lost* is a literary epic. It is the product of civilization, not of barbarism; but it expresses the mind of the Puritan age in which it was written, no less than the epic of old expressed the ideals of its own particular age. The revolt of commoner against king, and of Puritan against authority, may not be symbolized nor even intended, but it is there in spirit. And to recapture the eloquence of epic and to transfer it to a Puritan subject in English is a thing so wonderful, that the marvel is not that it is done so well, but that it could be done at all. The more we read *Paradise Lost*, the more there is to see in it; and if I have made new readers of it, or brought fresh interest to readers of it, the praise belongs to one equal in renown to

Blind Thamyris and Blind Maeonides,  
And Tiresias and Phineus prophets old.

Bk. iii, 35.

Who fed

on thoughts that voluntary move  
Harmonious numbers; as the wakeful bird  
Sings darkling, and in shadiest covert hid  
Tunes her nocturnal note.

Bk. iii, 37.

## XV

### COMEDY

SO far we have been considering the communication of story, or the telling of fiction as it is usually called, in the shape of narrative. Epic poetry, romance and novel, are told in that kind of writing called narration. There may be a good deal of description to illustrate the narrative. There will almost certainly be some dialogue to add vividness to the narrative. But ordinarily a story is communicated in narrative. And we decided, you will remember, that great masters of narrative had three great gifts: the power to depict and portray *characters*, the power to imagine and portray great *scenes*, and the power to represent the natural and characteristic *conversation* of their characters.

But now, supposing that we decided not to narrate the story, but to act it, what would happen? The narrative would shrink to nothing, for it would not be told, but acted. Conversation or dialogue would become tremendously important, for all the incidents of the story, and all the motives of the action, would have to be represented and revealed in the speeches made to each other and to the audience by the actors who represent the characters of the story. And if the story was so long that we could not represent every incident, or if there were some incidents that could not be very appropriately represented on the stage, we should have to disclose those incidents somehow in carefully prepared speeches, or in casual conversation between the actors. The great scenes would



still be there, but instead of being narrated and described they would have to be acted; and we should have to write either stage directions to each scene, or an introduction telling how the scene was to be arranged so that it could be acted.

The same gifts would be required—power to create characters, great scenes, and fine dialogue—but the method and the effect would be different. That method of telling a story is a comparatively early one, but the history of literature shows that it has always followed, and not preceded, the method of narrative in epic poetry and story. And that method of telling a story is known as *drama*, from a Greek word meaning a deed or action, and such a dramatized story is called a play. The effect of drama on an audience is quite different from that of story. Drama is much more moving. When we see a play, we laugh and cry much more readily than when we read the same story in a book. And the reason is, that drama makes a much more direct appeal to the imagination. Drama is seen by the eyes, and we hear through the actors the author telling the story; but in an epic or a novel we only overhear, as it were, the author telling the story. We have to grasp the meaning in reading before our imagination can get to work to reconstruct the characters and scenes.

Drama is more direct than story, but it is also more artificial. It can't tell everything, as a story can. It is limited by time. Three hours is just about the limit of human attention to a play. In that three hours or less, therefore, the story of the play must be told. A play simply cannot represent the details and the irrelevant digressions that the novelists delight in. It must stick to the broad outlines. It must represent the important and

most emotional scenes of the tale. When drama represents a scene, it is much more vivid than story; but it cannot give all the incidents and details, and it is probably the case that drama cannot convey such fine shades of thought and feeling in its dialogue as can story in its narrative. Irony, for instance, which is remarkably effective in narrative, is lost on the stage, except in the remarks of one character to another. I mean that a novelist can tell a story from the point of view of one particular character, in order to emphasize the difference between him and the average man, and, incidentally, to have a quiet laugh at him. Goldsmith's novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, to take a well-known example, gains greatly in humour by being told by the Vicar. But dramatize it for the stage, and it loses all its personal quality, and becomes simply a story of outraged innocence and vanquished villainy.

Nevertheless, drama is a very great form of art; and, as the basis of drama is the written dialogue made by the dramatist, who is also a poet, we may add that it is a very great form of the literary art. Drama is a social art. It attracts audiences which, for that performance at any rate, see the same things, and feel the same feelings. It is a popular art. Because of its easy and direct appeal to the imagination through the eye, it can bring poetry to those who have not imagination enough to read fiction. And because it is an art, it can quicken and refine the emotions, and set a standard of taste. And because it is acting, it can, at its best, display polite manners and a good accent in speaking that are not without influence on everyday life. And because it is literature it can convey feelings as well as story, and produce that sense of admiration which the fine treatment of a great subject invariably makes on the

mind. And if you ask me whether this is also true of the picture-films, which are drama photographed and phonographed, I answer that it is true in so far as a film is based on good literary art—on a good story, well told.

As an art, the writing of plays calls for exactly the same gifts as the writing of novels. The dramatist must be able to create characters that are definite human beings with a personality of their own. It is not enough that they have lines to speak, and can be represented by an actor or an actress in a fancy dress. They must be convincing, but a little better than the ordinary, or a little out of the ordinary, or "original," as we call it. The dramatist must be able to portray a scene. He must see it in his mind's eye, and feel it, too. And he must communicate his vision of the scene so vividly that we not only see it, but are convinced of its truth to human nature and to life. And he must have the gift of writing dialogue. That is, he must be able to make his characters talk convincingly and in an interesting fashion; and they must so talk that they arouse in us the emotions which they are supposed to feel.

But the writing of plays demands one gift, which, whilst it may be an advantage to the novelist to have it, is not essential to the writing of novels. I mean the power of creating dramatic interest. The dramatist must capture our interest from the beginning of the play: and our interest must be held in a grip like that of a magic spell as the story develops, and the incidents become more important. How is it done? Well, it is a gift. Some poets have it, and others have not. But speaking as a reader and not as a writer, it seems to me that amongst many ways there are two that stand out. One is to create *suspense*. We are put in doubt, and our doubts can not be dispelled until

something is cleared up. We are led to fear for the hero or heroine, and our apprehensions can not be quieted until they have triumphed over their difficulties. The great question is, will he do it? Will he clear himself of the slander? Will he escape the danger? Will he win the bride? The other way is to interest us in a *problem*. The beginning of the play is a kind of riddle. There is some question of conduct, or there is a mystery, and our interest is so aroused that it cannot rest until the riddle is solved. The question is, what ought she to do? and our minds are not at rest until we see what she really does. Or the question is, who stole the papers? or, who committed the crime? and we are not at rest until we know. Drama must have some direct and immediate interest of this kind, because, compared with a novel, a play takes us for such a short journey into the imaginary world. We can remember the whole thing when we come away from it. And as a short journey is naturally less interesting than a long, unless it is full of incident, drama must be more interesting, length for length, than a novel. The power of interesting us intensely, and of creating suspense, is one of the essential gifts of a dramatist.

Now drama, like fiction, may be about anything, and consequently there are many kinds of drama. But two broad main divisions into comedy and tragedy have stood the test of time, and are still used; so that there must be some justification for them. They correspond to the two simplest moods of human nature, the gay and the serious. There are, speaking broadly, two ways of looking at life. You may treat it as a joke, and say that it is laughable. Or you may treat it as a grave matter, and say that it is serious. The comic writer is fond of laughter, and loves

wit and humour, and the objects that provoke them—funny people and comical situations. The tragic writer feels the pity and the pathos of life, but he admires nobility of character and fortitude in suffering, and he portrays great men and women in difficult and trying circumstances. This is, of course, only a broad distinction, because the same writer can be the author of both comedies and tragedies. All of us have felt these moods. When we are healthy and happy, we tend to see the comic side of things. When we are grave, we tend to dwell on the serious side of things. In other words, life is a comedy to the optimist and the humorist; it is a tragedy to the pessimist and the sentimentalist.

I don't think it is possible to come any nearer to the root of the matter than what I have just said. There have been literary theories of comedy, and I will mention them in a minute, but literary theories are notorious for their *ex parte* and opinionative one-sidedness. Comedy can be the communication of mirth and high spirits. Comedy can be satirical. Comedy can be polite. Comedy can be serene and self-satisfied. Comedy can point to the ideal. Comedy can be concerned with growth and development, with youth, with success and happiness. Comedy can be primarily a matter of intellect. Life can be shown as something laughable because this in an imperfect world by its very nature. Think of what life might be if men were as wise and as good as angels, and compare it with what it is—a mixture of success and defeat, love and hate, kindness and meanness—and the contrast between the ideal and the real is ludicrous—a word which meant originally "as funny as a stage play." Comedy can poke fun, and

laugh at the absurdities and affectations and inconsistencies of human nature and social life.

Now all that, I think, is not without its value in life. It is a good thing to be happy. It is a good thing to be merry, and even boisterous at times. It is a greater thing to be able to see and to name and to estimate the forces which cause growth and development, and promote happiness and success. The man who can do this is wise. It is an even greater thing to be able to laugh at the contrast between the ideal of what life should be, and the unhappy reality of what life is. It is easy to grow impatient with the follies and knaveries of mankind. Life is so abounding in silliness and unfairness and downright injustice, that it is the easiest thing in the world to allow oneself to become that hateful thing, a superior person; or that even more loathsome thing, a bitter malcontent. We cannot all become rich, and if we are determined to regard happiness as something which depends on the number of things which we can acquire, whether it is bank-notes or facts, we shall experience a disillusion as terrible as that which comes when we find that the best men, the men that we have trusted, do not always act up to the highest ideals of conduct, and are not always consistent even with their own principles.

There is one great cure for pompous superiority and for the bitterness of inferiority, and indeed for all the affectations of life, and that is a sense of humour. If we can realize that these are some of the imperfections of life, and laugh at them; if we can tease the grumbler and the incompetent rather than scold and rail at them, and point out their folly in laughing at them, we have won the battle of life against melancholy and bitterness. We have not the cure for the ills of life. No one has. And if any

social idealist thinks in his angelic but ignorant heart that it is possible to make a heaven of peace and wealth and love in this mortal life, he is doomed to disappointment. But we have something which is nearly as good, we have a sense of humour, and we know how to endure. There is no gift so valuable in life, and no habit—for it may be acquired—so fruitful in promoting health of mind and social happiness as a sense of humour. And that is the feeling which inspires comedy. "Life is a comedy to the man who thinks." This is not to say that nothing matters: that life is not a serious matter. It is. And ideals are splendid and necessary things, as necessary to the wayfaring man as a lamp in the dark. We are right to recognize the meaning of life, we are right to feel the divine mystery of life. Life is a serious trust. Life is a difficult way. But this belongs to the realm of instinct and feeling. The comic view of life belongs to the realm of reason, and it is therefore human and imperfect. In a perfect world there would be no comedy. In an imperfect world, comedy is a valuable medicine.

Now how does the comic spirit find its expression in literature? Let me speak for a moment about some literary theories. The notion of comedy in the Middle Ages was that a comedy was a story in which the hero rises out of poverty and ill-fortune into prosperity. It was, in fact, the story with the happy ending, beloved by readers of romance, then as now. The Knight of Chaucer's Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* states the matter concisely in the Prologue to the "Nun's Priest's Tale":

As whan a man hath been in povre estaat  
And clymbeth up and waxeth fortunat,  
And ther abydeþ in prosperitee.  
Swich thing is gladsom, as it thinketh me.

And this view, the idea that comedy means a story with a happy ending, has remained the popular opinion down to our own day.

But with the Renaissance, there arose a learned conception of comedy. It was derived from the Latin comedies of Plautus and Terence; and the notion was that comedy represented types of human character in some story taken from everyday life, which should bring out and expose their faults and their follies. In other words, comedy was to laugh at examples of foolish people—foolish, that is, from the standpoint of common sense—by emphasizing their peculiarities. The function of comedy was to correct errors of character and behaviour by making them ridiculous, and to laugh at absurdities of fashion. In other words, the author of a comedy should be a satirist, and his concern is with characters, and not necessarily with stories with a happy ending. Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's contemporary, held this view, and he stated it in the Prologue to his first published play, *Every Man in His Humour*. His aim was:—

Deeds and language such as men do use,  
And persons such as Comedy would choose  
When she would show an image of the times,  
And sport with human follies, not with crimes.

It was thought that the story of a comedy should be such a series of incidents as might happen in real life; and the resultant comedy was to delight and instruct the spectator by making him laugh at aberrations from the normal standard of behaviour.

That opinion about comedy was never wholly accepted by the English stage. Shakespeare's interest in drama was



as firmly held by a good story, and by the poetry of dramatizing it, as by character. And his characters are portraits, and not caricatures. Here he differs from Jonson and from Molière, who accepted the learned conception of comedy. To them, a man's character was his predominant characteristic, or his ruling passion. To Shakespeare character was a sum of many qualities of various types. His comic characters have an individuality, a personality even, which is foreign to Latin comedy with its typical dramatic figures. His characters are more than comic ideas; they are men and women, and in drama there is no higher praise than that. To Shakespeare, mere laughter was not enough. There is a satisfying pleasure which comes from the delighted imagination, and the laughter and tears which come from the heart are better than that sour laughter which is the outward manifestation of scorn.

And that brings us to Shakespeare's comedies. What is the supremely comic event in life, according to Shakespeare? To Shakespeare, a comedy was a story of romantic love. The chief interest is the love-story of a hero and heroine, and the heroine is at least as wise and capable as the hero, if not better. Shakespeare's comedies are the love-stories of young men and women who are separated by some circumstance or some intrigue, and are at last made friends again. They undergo a great deal of misfortune before being united. The heroines indeed suffer more than their future husbands, but they make light of trouble by their gaiety and fortitude. One thinks of Portia's happy resourcefulness, Rosalind's fortitude and Beatrice's valour. Shakespeare's comic heroines differ from Imogen, Perdita and Miranda, the heroines of his last romances. The comic heroines are never simply passive. They abound in cunning

and resourcefulness, and, above all, they are gay even in the midst of their troubles. Indeed, from the *Merchant of Venice* onwards, in every comedy except the three last romances, the heroine arranges her own matrimonial affairs.

Yes, that is the supremely comic event according to Shakespeare—falling in love. There is delight in seeing love triumphant over obstacles. Comedy to Shakespeare, as to Chaucer, meant seeing a man climb up and become fortunate. Love is madness, but like poetry and lunacy, it is divine.

The lunatic, the lover and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact.

According to Shakespeare's comedies, love is so strong and true that it thrives on absence and misfortune, and we feel that his comic heroes and heroines will not be shipwrecked on the rocks of matrimony, because they have been tried and have stood the test. The final happiness of the hero and heroine is the reward of their steady and balanced character. They excel in patience and fortitude. They contend against obstacles that would daunt feebler mortals. They are healthy and sane and brave, and the happy ending of the story proceeds from the nature of the hero and heroine. They are happy because they make happiness. They are happy because their destiny is to be happy.

There are other auxiliary figures, foolish people with peculiarities, like the melancholy Jaques in *As You Like It*, and the puritanical Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*. They are comic types, and their fate is always the same. They are mocked and put to confusion. There are clowns, servants, watchmen, and other dull and stupid rustics. Their

function is to raise a laugh by their native wit, or by their ignorance of good manners and the King's English. There are jesters, like Touchstone and the fool in *Twelfth Night*, who attack folly and recommend sanity in a mixture of irony and good sense. And all these characters are more than comic ideas. They are men and women. And in drama there is no higher praise than that.

But they are all auxiliary to a story of romantic love in which a heroine rises from disaster, usually by her own efforts, and finally marries the man of her own choice. The story is remarkable for its improbabilities, and the remote setting—Athens, Venice, Arden, Illyria—seems to be purposely chosen so that the wild improbabilities of the incidents shall pass unchallenged. We leave reason in suspense, and are swept to the land of make-believe; which is another point of difference from classical comedy, and another reason why Shakespeare's comedies are delightful. A Shakespearean comedy is not only a romantic story with a happy ending. It *is* the happy ending. And that ending is delightful and happy because of the character of the heroine.

## XVI

### TRAGEDY

**I** SUPPOSE if any of us were asked to say what we meant by the word tragedy, we should inevitably say a play with an unhappy ending. And I think we can't do better than begin with that definition. Let us take that as a working definition at the outset: a tragedy is a play with an unhappy ending.

Now if you will think it over, you will realize that the unhappy ending must refer to some person or persons in the play. It does not matter whether we think of the plot as being so planned as to end unhappily, or the characters so conceived that we part from them feeling unhappy about them, the result is the same. That feeling of unhappiness is somehow connected with human nature. If we agree that stories are about people, then, I think, we can narrow down an unhappy ending to three possible ways. Let us put them down.

(1) People can be overwhelmed in a disaster by sheer ill-luck, through no fault of their own. They can perish or be ruined by fire, drought, earthquake, or some natural force of that kind.

(2) Some people can be ruined by the malice and ill-will of others, through no fault of their own.

(3) Some people, or one person, can be brought to ruin by his own fault. He can either do something which leads him to disaster, or he can so stir up malice and ill-will in other people that they bring him to ruin.

Let us consider these three possible ways for a moment.

Take the first one. Suppose that the ruin is brought about by accident, by sheer ill-luck. The effect may be lamentable and even awful, but it seems to have no connection with what has gone before. It is not a satisfactory way of ending a story, because it is allowing chance to end it; whereas a story, we feel, should develop naturally and inevitably to its ending, and the end should have some connection with the characters of the story. Some stories do end this way; and if we believe in luck, and in the importance of chance in life, we may justify such endings from the example of life itself; but such a story is not so coherent, nor, I believe, so satisfying, as one in which the events all follow from causes in the nature of the characters of the story.

Take the second one. Suppose that the catastrophe is brought about by sheer malice. I think exactly the same argument applies. The result is not completely satisfying. In real life people may be persecuted, but there is usually some motive for persecution; and it will usually be found, I think, that the motive will be found in some trait of character of the persecuted that annoys the persecutor. Sheer malice, malice without motive, is a sort of lunacy; and a story in which some one was ruined through no fault of his own by malicious persecution—a perfectly harmless and innocent man or woman brought to misery or even death—that would not be a satisfactory ending, though it might possibly be a good beginning for a story. We should not be satisfied with that ending. It would not be logical and inevitable. We should want to hear more.

So there remains only the third possibility where people bring about their own ruin through some fault of their own, and this is the most satisfactory of all, because the whole story is one logical development. We see the person

in the days of his success. We see his character displayed in the various things that he says and does. And we see how deficiencies and faults in the sum-total of his manhood lead him to take steps which bring him inevitably to grief. In other words, we see a study in deterioration, in which we can see the causes and their effects. Now that is serious, and possibly very sad; but it is comprehensible; and it is satisfactory to the mind, if unpleasant, because it is complete and logical and inevitable. That is tragedy, and if you want to see an example of it made by a man of our own times, I invite you to read Hardy's novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The destiny of Mr. Henchard, the Mayor of Casterbridge, is bound up in his character. The causes of his ruin lie within himself. He becomes what he becomes, because he is what he is. Success or failure depend upon character. Character is destiny. Tragedy may be other things in life, but that is what tragedy is in literature.

Now, quite obviously, tragedy could deal with the affairs of a family, or a faction, or a sect; but if it did, it would become needlessly complicated. Its subject and object of ruin, the tragic character, would be a composite portrait; and that complete and logical development which can be portrayed in the affairs of one person, would be absent. If one or two persons are emphasized, and, as it were, put in the foreground of the picture, tragedy, as a study of character, gains enormously. The thing becomes a portrait—a picture of character in action. Fortunately this can easily be done. Every family has a head. Every faction has a leader. The leader is more important than the follower. He is the man of ideas, the power, the typical representative of the cause. Tragedy portrays the important

man or woman. Tragedy, as a study in character, is the portrait of a hero.

Now what kind of a person is the tragic hero? He must be, we have agreed, one who brings about his ruin by his own fault. And, as we have seen, that ruin may involve the ruin of others, too. He cannot be wholly bad, for it is impossible to conceive a sane person who is bad in every respect; and the doings of a lunatic, though they might bring disaster, would not be tragic in the sense that character is destiny, for a lunatic is not responsible for his actions. The tragic hero cannot be an evil man; for, whilst we should think his ruin was just, we should be so unsympathetic and should hate him so much that we should find no pleasure in his story, which could hardly avoid being the fable of a bad boy who came to a bad end. Neither could he be a perfectly innocent and angelic character, for, according to the theory that character is destiny, such a character could not fail to lead to happiness and success. And we have already rejected as untragic that kind of ending where a perfectly good person is ruined and brought to disaster through no fault of his or her own.

So that, as has often been pointed out, the only satisfactory kind of hero for tragedy is a man or a woman who is, in some way or to some extent, important above the average, and is, moreover, neither wholly bad, nor wholly good, nor completely insane, but is, like all of us, an imperfect character. It is the imperfections of his character which bring about his ruin. And they bring it about because of the exceptional circumstances in which he is put. In ordinary circumstances he might go through life without suffering shipwreck. But in a tragedy everything is against the hero. The circumstances in which

he finds himself are precisely those which bring out and emphasize the faults in his nature; and he goes on, making greater and greater mistakes, until the last mistake of all means the end. Character is destiny.

That is what tragic error is; some fault, trifling perhaps, which is accentuated by circumstances until it brings about the hero's ruin. It is often difficult to define it exactly; for often, as in real life, it is not just what it seems. Othello's tragic error is not that he is jealous. It is that he is too willing to believe the tales that Iago tells him. He is too credulous. Hamlet's tragic error is not that he is dilatory or cowardly. It is that he is too sceptical. He needs to prove the Ghost's statement by means of a play before he is convinced. After that, he is not dilatory. He is rash. He is not cowardly, he is brave. He upbraids the Queen, kills Polonius in mistake for the king, boards a pirate ship single-handed, and fights a duel with Laertes. But some fault of error there must be, if character is destiny, and that destiny is calamity and ruin; otherwise the tragic hero would lose our sympathy; and sympathy, or pity, if you like to call it so, for the tragic hero with his tragic error and his tragic fate, is essential.

Pity for the hero with his tragic error, and for the unfortunates who are involved in his ruin! Horror at the tremendous volume and disproportion of his fate, which is out of all justice to the measure of his fault! These are the emotional effects of tragedy. We may feel the glamour of romance, the thrill of suspense, and the wonder of admiration, or we may not. These are accidents and not essentials. But pity, and a sense of shock or horror, are essential to tragedy; or, to put it into simpler language, tragedy must not only draw the portrait of a



character, it must make us sympathize with the character, too. It must make us feel: Such a fine man or such a fine woman! What a pity! What a terrible calamity! It is the peculiar virtue of tragedy amongst all the forms of literary art to make us feel this particular kind of sympathy, the pity which naturally arises from the spectacle of ruin and disaster, combined with admiration for the hero, and a knowledge that he has brought ruin upon himself, or contributed to his own disaster by tragic errors in that splendid character.

Now that is what tragedy is, or, at any rate, that is my explanation of it in as simple language as I can command. It is a very ancient form of drama, with a lineage that takes us back to the fifth century B.C., when Greek tragedy was written for, and performed at, an Athenian spring festival to Dionysus, the god of wine. And it is a very noble form of literary art because from its very nature it is serious and philosophical in tone, and it requires for its production not only intense capacity for feeling, but a deep knowledge of human nature derived from insight.

That being the case, I want you to consider for a moment the effect of tragedy on the mind, and the value of tragedy, if it has a value. First of all, let us consider the effect. There is the portrait of the central figure, and of others who are for him and against him. There is the story, usually some great romantic story, which is outlined by certain important scenes. There is the skill of the author in arranging and dramatizing his subject so as to reveal, without drawing attention to them, the tragic faults of the hero. There is the sympathy and pity which we feel for the hero, and possibly for some of the other characters, too. All these are blended in an indescribable feeling of wonder

and admiration and pity at a noble failure, or at suffering borne with fortitude. I am, of course, speaking of the effect of the play when acted, and we must never forget that plays are written to be acted. But something of the same effect may be obtained from reading. Indeed, if one has sufficient imagination to visualize the play as one reads, reading is probably more satisfactory, because the interpretation of parts is always just as we would have it, and we are never troubled by scenery that we dislike.

But there is still another effect. I mean the impression which remains after seeing a play or after reading it. The effect is unique in the case of every tragedy, because it is largely the impression made by the character of the hero. The effect of *Hamlet* is quite different from that of *Macbeth*. *Othello* is poles asunder from *Lear*. But in every instance there is present, too, a feeling of something which is very difficult indeed to define—a feeling which, to me at any rate, seems most like that which one experiences on leaving a magnificent cathedral, or just after hearing a sublime piece of music—a feeling of grandeur and awe, a feeling in which fresh resolution and strength is mingled with pity for human frailty and error, a feeling which Milton communicates in those eloquent lines of *Manoah* at the end of *Samson Agonistes*.

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail  
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,  
Dispraise or blame, nothing but well and fair,  
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

That is the effect of tragedy, and it is an effect so glorious as to stamp tragedy as belonging to another world. Comedy belongs to this imperfect world. Tragedy deals

with human imperfections, too, but in spite of that, it carries with it that sense of awe which is the tribute of man's sense of the mystery and significance of life to the divine. To the Greeks a tragedy was a religious ceremony, and something of its origin still remains.

So much for the effect. And now a word about the value of tragedy, for it can be shown, I think, that it has a value. Why do we read or go to see a great tragedy? There are two reasons, I think: one is the author, the other is his work. We perceive in the tragedy the imagination, and the feelings and thoughts, of a mind more imaginative, more emotional, and more sensitive than ours. This is true of all great art. We come in contact with the artist's mind. Now that is a great experience. Mind receives enlargement and enlightenment from a greater mind. Travel in the imaginary world benefits the mind no less, nay, perhaps even more, than travel in the real world of trains and steamers. Contact with the mind of a great tragic poet is an experience that is worth having, and the proof is that the experience is unforgettable. But in the poet's work, in the tragedy itself, there is a value. Caught up in the coil of the tragedy, we are lifted clean out of the humdrum affairs and the petty cares of our little life into another world of greater actions and greater griefs. The feelings which it arouses in us are real feelings, though the events for which they are aroused are purely imaginary. And these feelings of sympathy and admiration and pity, heart and brain united together in exultation at the vision of something which is emotionally and intellectually sublime, are feelings which ennoble and refine the mind. The value of tragedy is that it shows us that feelings can be noble, and that, before the greatest issues in life, humour must give way

to seriousness. There are some locks which humour will not open, and tragedy, whether in the real world or in the imaginary, is one of them.

And that brings me to the consideration for a moment of Shakespeare's tragedies, for it is through Shakespeare that most of us come in contact with tragedy. What is the supremely tragic event in life, according to Shakespeare? To Shakespeare, a tragedy was a picture of the fall of a great man. There was something medieval in that conception. The Greek conception of tragedy as practised by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and enunciated by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, had been forgotten. And there had grown up the more prosaic conception that tragedy was the story of the fall of a prince ending with his death. As Chaucer puts it in the Prologue to the "Monk's Tale":

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,  
As olde bokes maken us memorie,  
Of him that stood in greet prosperitee  
And is yfallen out of heigh degree  
Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly.  
And they ben versified communely  
Of six feet, which men clepen hexametron;  
In prose eke ben endited many oon.

The fall of a great man, who somehow comes in conflict with opposing forces and is worsted by them! That is Shakespeare's idea of tragedy. And the fall of the great man necessitates his death, and very frequently the deaths of others also. But the tragic fact is his failure, and not his death. The tragic hero is always a man. Greek tragedy had its tragic heroines, its Antigones and Electras; but Shakespeare only admits his Lady

\*inspiration? On the other hand, the conception of the subject is a legitimate field of criticism. We have here to enquire for beauty or excellence of the quality of its imagination and emotion. Is it fine, restrained, delicate, vivid and sure? Has it sublimity?—does it impress or even inspire awe by its nobility and grandeur? Has it the sweetness of melancholy or pathos? Has it the beauty of joy, grace or humour? Has it the fineness of wit, or satire, or irony? And, above all, does it bear the stamp of fidelity of observation? Is it, even when it parts company with real life or the world as we know it, true to nature and to life?

Conception, we have said, leads straight to structure, the architecture of writing; and structure or form lies within the bounds of criticism. We have to ask here questions such as these: is the form adequate for the subject? Or, is it more than adequate, like *Lycidas*, or less than adequate, like *Paradise Lost*? Is there harmony of plan and arrangement? Is there beauty of design? Is there due economy of effort or prodigal waste? Does every part contribute to the total effect of the whole? Or, are certain episodes or passages unnecessary, and do they detract from the harmony and balance of the whole? Is the emphasis in the right places? Does the grand climax come at the right time? And, is the ending inevitable?

After conception comes the expression in words; and expression or style is the most obvious ground of criticism. Does our author write simply and directly, or does he write with eloquence and art? Or, does he shun high efforts of imagery and concentrate on brevity, cadence, and beauty of words? However we may characterize his style, whether plain, flowery, or polished, is there a due

attention to the graces of literary manners, to lucidity, grace, rhythm, dignity and sweet reasonableness? Does he, like an urbane writer, attempt to charm and persuade; or, is he an individualist distinguished by personal mannerisms, or burning with the consciousness of one idea? These questions are elementary and obvious enough, but if the work which we are reading has artistic excellence, as well as imaginative or moral excellence, its excellences will be found in details such as these. It is only in the treatment of a subject that there is art. The subject itself concerns us only as philosophers, mental or moral, or as historians or scientists of sorts. It is the treatment—how it is done—that matters to the literary critic. And when we have grasped the conception and expression, and appreciated its general effect and its particular excellences, we are well on the way towards criticism. There are modes of criticism which lie beyond this analytic method, of course. A good critic should be able to compare passage with passage, poem with similar poem, drama with drama, novel with novel, not confining himself either to his own language and his own period. A great critic should be himself a creative artist, able to penetrate by intuition the sources and qualities of literary genius.

But this mode of enquiry by meaning, quality and effect, will repay the beginner. There is a positive danger in personal appreciation backed neither by study nor learning. It leads easily to a facile expression of self-satisfied egoism which is the negation of real knowledge. Drawing-room talk about authors and books is interesting, very interesting, and it has its place in life; but it is an unsatisfactory method of criticism, though it may contribute something to criticism. For our purpose, which is the quest of truth, we need to take an objective view of what we read, unbiassed

by personal prejudice. The preliminary of such criticism is more than the gathering of an impression; it is an investigation.

After reading a work, a student's desire to understand it should lead him to study the personality of its author, through biography and letters, in search of the character and quality of his mind. He must delve more deeply than the average reader. He must pursue the intention and purpose of the author, and trace as far as possible the author's conception of his work from the first hint of the subject to its final form. He must examine the choice of form, and the structure and arrangement of the work. He must examine the author's idiom, characterize its style, and describe its qualities and its effect. He may compare, if comparison seems worth while, the characteristics of his author or his work with those of another who offers a similarity or a contrast. And, finally, he may arrive at his own estimate of the beauty and excellence of the work, which, by such an enquiry, has been based, not on whim or on prejudice, but on understanding, rational examination, and comparison.

This is a way of criticism which is chiefly descriptive. It is elementary, of course, and not final. The student of literature may become a biographer or a literary historian, or a philosophical critic with methods created by his genius. He may even become an interpreter, and may criticize with the sympathetic insight of a poet. But these are the ends of criticism, not the beginnings. It is a good thing to learn the value of a discipline of study, not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end. Fine appreciation of good literature is the reward of study and developed taste. Begin with a proper method of study and develop your taste, and the fine appreciation will come in due time.

## XIX

### *TECHNICAL TERMS OF CRITICISM*

#### § 1

**T**HERE are certain terms descriptive of certain features and facts of literary expression that are as necessary to the literary critic as are the technical terms of music to the musical critic; and it is important, firstly, never to use a term unless you know exactly what it means, and, secondly, to use technical terms consistently. I mean this. Suppose, for example, you feel impelled to characterize some fact as "romantic." Look before you leap. Find out from a dictionary, preferably the big Oxford English Dictionary, what "romantic" means. Fix its meaning for you, and continue to use the word consistently in that meaning. Don't say "romantic" if you really mean "Platonic" or "revolutionary." Don't say "style" if you really mean personal idiom. Criticism has always suffered from this inaccurate misuse of terms. Even Longinus confuses sublimity of thought and eloquence of expression under the one word, "sublime". Addison uses "fancy" and "imagination" indiscriminately as synonyms for romantic fiction. Try to be accurate.

Now it is impossible in this short chapter to define all these terms. There are many more than can be discussed here. An explanation of them would fill a book, for many of them require discussion, and most of them need illustrative passages to exemplify them. I am merely going to give in the baldest possible way a few necessary definitions.



To begin with, there are various technical terms for the ways in which language is used:—

*Narrative* tells a story or relates a sequence of events.

*Description* defines, or sketches a picture or portrait.

*Dialogue* reports conversation, as if overheard.

*Argument* expresses a process of reasoning, emphasizing or proving certain thoughts.

*Analysis* makes a minute and detailed examination, as if with a microscopic eye of the mind.

*Discussion* considers the effect or result of certain significant details.

The adjectives corresponding to these terms are: narrative, descriptive, conversational, argumentative, and analytic. There is no adjective corresponding to "discussion." "Discursive," which means rambling or expatiating, is not quite the same thing.

## § 2

There are various names for traditional literary forms:—

An *Epic* is a serious story of heroic action, like *The Iliad* or *The Aeneid*. The adjective is "epic" or "epical."

A *Romance* is a pleasant story of heroism and love, with scene and incidents remote from everyday life. The adjective is "romantic."

A *Fable* is a moral anecdote concerning the habits of men or animals. In eighteenth century English, "fable" is the name for the plot of a drama, or of a story.

A *Ballad* is a poem, usually in common metre (8.6 : 8.6), which narrates a popular story; like the ballads of "Sir Patrick Spens" and "Chevy Chase." In modern

popular usage, "ballad" is a name for a sentimental drawing-room song.

A *Novel* is a prose story which represents characters in incidents and actions such as may happen in real life. There is no corresponding adjective. The nearest is "realistic."

A *Fiction* is any story invented or imagined on the analogy of human life, whether romantic or realistic. The adjective is "fictional."

A *Drama* is a fiction adapted by means of dialogue for presentation on the stage. The adjective is "dramatic."

A *Lyric* or *Song* is a short poem expressive of personal mood or feeling, which is fit to be set to music and sung. The adjective is "lyrical."

An *Ode* is an exalted and impassioned lyric, designed usually to be sung by a choir.

An *Elegy* is a song of lamentation, or moody reflection, especially a poem written to lament the death of a dear friend. The adjective is "elegiac."

An *Essay*, originally a literary composition on any subject, now usually implies a discursive expression in prose of personal feelings, reminiscences, or thoughts upon a given theme, like Lamb's *Essays of Elia*.

An *Idyll* is an idealized sketch, especially of rustic life. It may be descriptive, like Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* or Burns's *Cottar's Saturday Night*, or it may be fictional, like Tennyson's *Enoch Arden*. The adjective is "idyllic."

A *Pastoral* is a romance of shepherd life, either in the form of an idyll, like Wordsworth's *Michael*, or drama, like

Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, or elegy, like Milton's *Lycidas*. The adjective is "pastoral."

An *Eclogue* is a pastoral dialogue, like Pope's *Pastorals* or Gay's *Shepherd's Week*.

A *Tragedy* is a serious drama, usually with romantic fiction and unhappy ending. The adjective is "tragic."

A *Comedy* is a gay and amusing drama, usually with a realistic fiction and a happy ending. The adjective is "comic."

A *Tragi-comedy* is a drama of mixed tragic and comic threads of story.

*Didactic Poetry* is poetry which is designed to instruct. Usually it describes certain facts, tinged with beauties of sentiment and imagination, and enunciates certain lessons. Examples are Virgil's *Georgics*, and Pope's *Essay on Man*.

A *Satire* is a good-humoured attack on certain men or ways of thought, a denunciation of bad behaviour and irrational thinking.

### § 3

There are also certain technical terms used in versification:—

*Rhythm* is the swing of the verse, determined by recurrent grouping of feet. The adjective is "rhythmical."

A *foot* is a recurring group of syllables that goes to compose a line of verse. In English such feet consist of combinations of stressed and unstressed syllables.

An *iambus* (- —) consists of an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable. The adjective is "iambic." Iambic feet: "Let music sound while he doth make his choice."

An *anapest* (- - —) consists of two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed. The adjective is "anapaestic." Anapaestic feet: "I am out of humanity's reach."

A *trochee* (— -) consists of a stressed followed by an unstressed syllable. The adjective is "trochaic." Trochaic feet: "Lives of great men all remind us."

A *dactyl* (— - -) consists of a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed. The adjective is "dactylic." Dactylic feet: "Make no deep scrutiny into her mutiny."

In English also a *monosyllabic* foot, consisting of a single stressed syllable, is found, especially in trochaic measures where the number of syllables is odd; as, for example, in the last syllable of the line, "We can make our lives sublime" (— - — - — -).

*Anacrusis* is the name given to an unstressed syllable at the beginning of the line, as in the trochaic line, "The Queen was in the garden" (- — - — - -).

*Scansion* is testing the rhythm of verse by marking the number and quality of the feet.

*Metre* is any form of poetic rhythm, determined by the rhythm and the number of feet, e.g.:

*Iambic Tetrameter* = a line of four iambic feet.

*Iambic Pentameter* = a line of five iambic feet.

*Trochaic Tetrameter* = a line of four trochaic feet.

*Rhyme* is similarity of sound in the final syllable or syllables of two or more lines.

A *Couplet* is a pair of rhyming lines. A couplet in iambic tetrameter is usually known as an *octosyllabic couplet*, e.g.:

The way was long, the night was cold,  
The minstrel was infirm and old.

A couplet in iambic pentameter is usually known as an *heroic couplet*, e.g.:

True wit is nature to advantage dress'd,  
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd.

A *Stanza* is one repetition of the metrical pattern of a poem, of a couplet, or a verse of a hymn.

A *verse* is (archaic) a metrical line containing a certain number of feet, or (modern) a short stanza. "Verse" is also used as a name for metrical composition in general. As its meaning is so extended, the word is best used to imply metrical composition as opposed to prose.

*Blank Verse* is unrhymed verse, especially unrhymed lines in iambic pentameter.

An *Alexandrine* is a line of six iambic feet, or iambic hexameter.

A *quatrain* is a stanza of four lines, rhyming either *abab* or *abba*.

The *Spenserian Stanza* is the stanza used by Spenser in his *Faerie Queene*. It consists of nine lines, viz., eight lines of iambic pentameter, followed by an alexandrine, rhyming *ab ab bc bc c*.

*Ottava Rima* is the stanza used by Byron in *Don Juan*. It consists of eight lines in iambic pentameter rhyming *ab ab ab cc*.

A *Sonnet* is a stanza of fourteen lines in iambic pentameter. It falls normally into two parts—the *octave* (two groups of four lines) and the *sestet* (six lines, or two groups of three. The octave rhymes *abba abba*. The

sestet rhymes *cde cde*, or in some variation of these three rhymes.

The *Shakespearian Sonnet* consists of fourteen lines in  
 \* iambic pentameter, arranged as three quatrains and  
 a couplet, rhyming *ab ab, cd cd, ef ef, gg*.

#### § 4

And lastly, there are technical names for various turns of poetic language, which, though not essential to the enjoyment of reading or to criticism, have the sanction of age behind them, and are better recognized and named than unobserved. They are known as "figures of speech." The adjective is "figurative." These are the commonest figures:

*Hyperbaton*, or inversion of the normal order for the sake of emphasis, e.g.:

Him the Almighty Power  
 Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' ethereal sky.

(*Paradise Lost*, I.)

*Ellipsis*, or omission of words needed to complete the sense or the construction, e.g.:

What! All my pretty chickens and their dam  
 At one fell swoop? (*Macbeth*.)

The following are figures which are charged with emotion:—

*Hyperbole*, or exaggeration, e.g.:

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
 Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather  
 The multitudinous seas incarnadine  
 Making the green one red. (*Macbeth*.)

*Irony*, or simulation of ignorance, or of the opposite point of view for the purpose of ridicule, *e.g.*:

Verily ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you.  
(*Book of Job.*)

*Litotes*, or understatement, *e.g.*:

No fool was he = he was a clever man.

*Rhetorical Question*, or the question to which no answer is expected, because it is obvious, *e.g.*:

What do they know of England, who only England know?

*Prosopopoeia* or *Personification*, *i.e.*, viewing an idea or thing as the embodiment of some force, *e.g.*:

Where eldest Night  
And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold  
Eternal anarchy.  
(*Paradise Lost*, II.)

The following are figures which are charged with fancy:—

*Simile*, or comparison, *e.g.*:

Their glory withered. As when Heaven's fire  
Hath scath'd the forest oaks or mountain pines.  
(*Paradise Lost*, I.)

I came like Water, and like Wind I go.  
(*Omar Khayyám.*)

*Metaphor*, or implied comparison; the application of a descriptive term to an object to which it does not literally apply, *e.g.*:

His men were *lions* in the fight.  
The good ship *ploughs* the sea.

Metaphors are dangerous playthings. They may easily become mixed, *e.g.*:

The muddy pool of politics was the *rock* on which  
I *split*.

*Metonymy*, or the substitution of an attribute for a thing,  
or of a symbol for an idea, *e.g.*:

The *Flower* that once has blown for ever dies.  
(*Omar Khayyám.*)

The *pen* is mightier than the *sword*.

*Periphrasis*, or *Circumlocution*, indirect description of a  
person or thing by other words, *e.g.*:

"The cup that cheers" = tea.

"The azure main" = the sea.

"The Bard of Avon" = Shakespeare.

And lo! *the Hunter of the East* has caught  
The Sultan's Turret in a *Noose of Light*.

(*Omar Khayyám.*)

Finally there are certain ways of playing upon  
words:—

*Hypallage*, or the transferred epithet, *i.e.*, exchange of the  
position of an adjective from its appropriate substan-  
tive to one to which it does not belong, *e.g.*:

The ploughman homeward plods his *weary* way.  
(Gray's *Elegy.*)

*Onomatopoeia*, or imitation by words of sounds, *e.g.*:

I heard the water lapping on the crag,  
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.  
(*Morte d'Arthur.*)



*Alliteration*, or the commencement of words, or of accented syllables, with the same letter, *e.g.*:

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,  
The furrow followed free;  
We were the first that ever burst  
Into that silent sea.

(*The Ancient Mariner.*)

The *Pun*, or use of words of the same sound with different meanings, or use of a word to suggest different meanings, *e.g.*:

Old Gaunt, indeed, and gaunt in being old.

(*Richard II.*)

## XX

### SOME METHODS OF CRITICISM

"There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal  
lays,  
And every single one of them is right!"

AND there are methods innumerable of making a criticism of a literary work. Every great critic evolves his own method, and usually it will be found to correspond to something prized by his age, or to emphasize some characteristic or quality dear to his taste. When you have become a great reader and a great critic, you will no doubt evolve your own methods from your own theory of poetry and philosophy of art. Meanwhile it is as well to begin with some method which will clarify our thoughts about the things we read, and give us some topics to write about. I propose to set before you three elementary approaches to criticism, elementary only in the sense that they are within your powers, but they may be mastered so magnificently that the result may be worth reading, provided that you have the sensibility and the intellect and the urbanity of a critic. The value of criticism, it must be remembered, depends not on the method used but on the genius of the critic. And I need hardly add that these methods of approach are not intended to exclude each other. It would be difficult to find a great passage of criticism which was not, to some extent, based on all of them.

First of all, let us consider the *descriptive* method. In this the critic describes the subject of the work, the

author's conception of his subject, as seen in his treatment of it; and finally the form which the conception takes, and the style in which it is clothed in words. Comparison with other works, and with the methods and idioms of other authors, is valuable at every stage of the descriptive method. There is nothing which an apt comparison will not illustrate—from an episode or a character down to a metaphor. In this method, judgment is made by comparison, rather than by absolute statements of opinion. It is the easiest method of all, and an excellent mode of criticism for the beginner.

Then there is the *judicial* method. In this, the critic judges the work by standards and principles which he has derived from his theory of poetry. It is a method not to be lightly undertaken, but if there are any principles of right or wrong, if there is any difference between good and bad, it is a method which is needed, and which will some day come into its own. You cannot pass a judgment on an author's conception, for the free roving imagination is beyond blame; and you might as well blame a man for having a snub nose or red hair as for choosing to treat his own subject. You may not say that he is without restraint, or that he is temperamentally a cad; for this is personal, not literary, criticism. But think of his subject, and you are on safer ground. Is it a subject which is capable of literary treatment? Is it a subject which has artistic possibilities? Here it is legitimate to say either that it is a good subject, well or badly treated, or a bad subject treated better than it deserved. Then we pass on to his treatment of the subject. Is the subject treated in the best possible way? Is the form which he has chosen the most appropriate? Is the style in which it is written a style appropriate to the

subject and the form? And above all, has it excellences,<sup>9</sup> such as descriptions, imagery, incidents, and characters, which will bear comparison with the best, and which are, moreover, appropriate to its form and style? It is a magisterial method, and calls for a magisterial style. It is not everybody's way of utterance, but it has tradition behind it. Like the little girl, "when it is good, it is very, very good; but when it is bad, it is horrid."

Finally, there is the method which to most beginners will be found, together with the descriptive method, the best. I mean the *interpretative* method. Here the critic is an interpreter of the mind and art of the author. He reads to find answers to these questions. Firstly, *what was the author's intention?* What was his aim? What did he set out to do? Is he trying to sketch a portrait? Is his interest in a certain situation and its possible consequences? Is he interested in an intellectual theme? Or, is his interest merely bound up with word-pictures, imagery, fine descriptions? The answers to this enquiry are innumerable, but it is a question which is worth asking. Secondly, granted that we have discovered the secret of what the author is trying to do, *has he succeeded in doing what he set out to do?* Has he made the portrait live? Is it convincing? Has he depicted the situation and its consequence truly? Is he true to life? Has he argued out his theme? Has he succeeded in his images? How do they compare with others? Again, the answers are many, for there are many lines of effort; but on these the value of the criticism largely depend. To appreciate success in literature, to say whether *Hamlet* is a masterpiece or an artistic failure, is the very summit of the critical mount. It is impossible to appreciate, unless we have developed not

only learning, but judgment. But the question has to be faced. Has the author done exactly what he meant to do? A bull's-eye is always a bull's-eye; but a miss is as good as a mile away. This answer requires sympathy, insight, sensibility, and above all, judgment; and of such are critics made.

Lastly, comes the final question: *Was it worth while?* Has the mountain laboured and brought forth a miserable mouse? Was the author's intention a reasonable one? Was it possible to put it into words? Does it contain beauties of part and whole which are in accord with the universal principles of beauty as recognized by man; or is it just a freak of nature, a pretentious attempt, bad art concealed under a show of artifice and originality? Here enters, too, the moral attitude. With so much to select from, with so much in the world that is beautiful, was it worth while to insert such and such expressions, this episode, that suggestion? To decide whether the intention and the attempt are worth while is also a question to which different people would undoubtedly render different answers. How far those answers carry weight depends more on the character of the critic than on his method.

And so we are led back to this, that the value of the judgment of a reader or a critic depends upon the value of his character and personality as a man; and that all our learning, however deep, and all our genius, however brilliant, will carry little weight, and though it may amuse, will fail to convince, unless it is seen that we love honesty and truth, and hate sham and fraud; and that we love the things which are admirable, and hate meanness, corruption and cowardice. A critic should check a disposition to despise what is generally admired, unless he can say

deliberately why it is far from being admirable. The best critics are those generous souls whose minds turn naturally to those human qualities which are noble and admirable and good.

And now, gentle reader, having conducted you, with a light touch I hope, through the field of English studies from language to writing, from writing to literature, from literature to criticism, and having shown you the foothills where a child can walk, whence rise craggy and abrupt high mountains, whither only clear heads and persevering bodies are able to climb, the time has come to say good-bye and part. And as scouts, when they part, wish one another "Good hunting!", so I would wish you good reading—a brain stored with a thousand beauties, a thousand noble examples, and a thousand wise thoughts.

I sincerely trust that my recommendation of reading will not turn you into that horrible reptile, the intellectual person who is all interest and all sympathies and all ideals, and without common sense. I see no reason why a man should not be perfectly sane and yet well read. If ever you feel yourself becoming self-centered, or in the grip of a fixed idea, whether it be the domination of a country not your own, or the importance of some relatively trivial branch of study that leads to nowhere, pull yourself up, and try to recover your balance. Unless you are born a genius—and that is a misfortune which, if it is yours, you cannot avoid—it is better to be an average man than an extraordinary person; it is better to be a Sydney than a Shelley. If ever you feel yourself in danger of becoming a superior person, read Boswell's *Life of Johnson*; and the beauty of this book is that it will bear reading again and again.

' If you feel that you must write—and, speaking personally, I should feel very flattered if I thought that the reading of my book had helped you in that endeavour; if you feel that you have opinions which are worth communicating, or if you feel within you the poet's soul, do not be disheartened by the difficulty of writing, and by the reluctance of your conception to take shape in perfect form. Perfection of form is the rarest and the highest feature of great art. Go on with your writing until practice makes perfect. And always remember this, which is not my saying, but the dictum of a very wise man: "Literature is a good stick, but a very bad crutch."









